MEDITATIONS ON THE LITANY

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MONUMENT TO THE GLORY OF MARY.

LITANY

OF

The Most Holy Virgin

ACCOMPANIED WITH MEDITATIONS;

BY

THE ABBÉ EDWARD BARTHE,

HONORARY CANON OF RODEZ.

1871
CITY OF W

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

AN UNWORTHY DAUGHTER OF ST. JOSEPH.

PHILADELPHIA:
PETER F. CUNNINGHAM, 216 SOUTH THIRD STREET.
1871.

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DIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA.

CATHEDRAL, LOGAN SQUARE,
Philadelphia, March 28th, 1871.

We cheerfully approve of the publication of the "Monument to the Glory of Mary," translated from the French of the Abbé Barthe, and recommend it to the faithful as a most pious and edifying work.

✠ *JAMES FREDERIC,*
Bishop of Philadelphia.

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DEDICATED

TO

Right Rev. James Frederic Wood, D. D.

BISHOP OF PHILADELPHIA;

As a Testimony of the Respect and Gratitude

OF

THE TRANSLATOR.

LETTERS OF COMMENDATION.

Letter of his Eminence, Cardinal Giraud, Archbishop of Cambria, addressed to the Abbé Edward Barthe, author of the Meditations on the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

My Very Dear Abbé:—It was only at my return from a long and laborious journey that I came to the knowledge of your beautiful Litany. It justifies its title, and is truly a "Monument to the glory of Mary." I beg of you to ask the publisher to send me one dozen copies. I shall make some persons happy by distributing that number, and shall be so myself in keeping a copy for my library.

Receive, dear Abbé, my congratulations, etc.,

Peter Card Giraud, Archbishop of Cambria.

Cambria, June 11th, 1849.

Letter of the Bishop of Rodez to the Abbé Ed. Barthe, author of the Meditations on the Litany.

My Dear Abbé:—I cannot any longer defer expressing the deep emotion I felt in reading your Litany of the Blessed Virgin. Every one has been struck with the beauty of the engravings, and I may say, *ut Pictura, Oratio;* I could even use the text, *ut Pictura*, *Poesis,* as the Holy Scripture, with which your Meditations are replenished, and in some manner tissued, is as a garden where your taste and piety gather sweet-scented flowers, and images full of poetry. Correctness, purity, and elegance are found in every one of these beautiful engravings, and edifying pages that follow them. I rejoice that a priest of my diocese, already known to me in most honorable relations, has given to learned and Christian France a work which will be widely diffused, and which will make the august Mary loved, admired, and venerated in these times, when, more than ever, we need to place ourselves under her glorious protection.

Receive, my dear honorary Canon, the renewed assurance of my esteem and affection.

John, Bishop of Rodez.

APPROBATION OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF PARIS.

Marie Dominique Auguste Sibour, by the Divine mercy and the favor of the Apostolic See, Archbishop of Paris:

On the report of the Examiner appointed by us, and the favorable decision of our Commission of Studies, we have approved, and by these presents approve, a book entitled "Monument to the Glory of Mary," accompanied with Meditations by the Abbé Edward Barthe, Honorary Canon of Rodez, published in Paris by P. J. Camus.

Given in Paris, under our seal, the signature of our Vicar-General, President, and the countersignature of our Commission of Studies, July 2d, 1851.

The President of the Commission of Studies,
L. BANTAIN, Vicar-General.
The Secretary of the Commission of Studies,
JUL. FLANDRIN, Hon. Can.

APPROBATION OF THE BISHOP OF RODEZ.

It was with as much pleasure as attention that we, ourselves, read, when they appeared, the numbers of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, expounded by Rev. Edward Barthe. We have found throughout this book the most exact orthodoxy, as well as correctness and elegance of style, a rare and deep knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, the charm and unction of a lively faith and tender piety. All these different merits to which we have already given testimony, are laid on the solid foundation of Catholic teaching and the pure doctrine of the Church; therefore we believe ourselves bound to recommend again this good and beautiful book, which is all for the glory of the Immaculate Mother of God, and which must be precious to the devout and fervent children of that Queen of the Church and Mother of Christians.

Given at our Residence of Vabres, on the Feast of All Saints, in the year of our Lord 1850.

JOHN, Bishop of Rodez.

INTRODUCTION.

THE word "Litany" signifies in Latin, *rogationes,* in English, *public prayer.* No litanies have been formally approved by the Church except those of the Holy Name of Jesus, of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Saints.

That of the Blessed Virgin bears also the name of "Litany of Loretto," not because it was composed in that place consecrated by remembrances attached to Mary, for it is not known where or by whom were formed those pious, touching and sublime invocations in honor of the Mother of the divine Jesus. But, from a reliable tradition, it was in Loretto that commenced the solemn chant of the Litany, and it is thence that the use of it has spread throughout the Church, by means of innumerable pilgrims who have not ceased to visit the venerable sanctuary.

Whatever may have been its date and origin, we know the value attached by Catholic piety to these supplications so replete with devout praises. They form an epitome of all that has been said or could be said of the glory of the Blessed Virgin, from the time she quitted this earth to reign with her adorable Son in heaven, there to receive from men all the homage that a creature can receive. The special worship with which we honor Mary goes back to the epoch of her glorious Assumption. She, that humble daughter of Eve, when yet bearing in her chaste womb the blessed fruit of the Holy Ghost, being on a visit to St. Elizabeth who was herself mother of a miraculous child, though by an act very different from the divine power, she had said, in the immortal canticle of her ecstatic gratitude, that "all generations should proclaim her blessed." Astonishing words! words which we would be tempted to regard as the height of madness from the mouth of a mortal. But it was not a simple woman who was then speaking; she was the mother of the Man-God, full of grace, spouse of that Divine Spirit, who had before enlightened the prophets of Israel; and from the heights of Hebron, penetrating into the most remote future, she could, with assurance, say what God showed her concerning her future glory among men. Behold how faithfully all generations have accomplished this prediction! Listen to the echo of Catholic history. For the space of eighteen centuries it resounds the incomparable name of Mary, and repeats, in accents louder than those of the trumpet, the grandeur, the merit and the power of that Divine Mother.

Looking back to the primitive Church, we find, from the beginning, the glory of Mary celebrated by the arts. Not to speak here of the paintings attributed to St. Luke, (paintings which have been so much honored in the East, and are not wanting of proofs of their authenticity) we have from the second or third century a painted image of Mary, which the eye of the antiquarian may, even to this day, study in the Catacombs of Rome. This monument of ancient devotion shows clearly that, from the establishment of the Church, even in the midst of persecutions, Christian artists consecrated their pencils to the Blessed Virgin. In the fourth century we find on several sarcophagi or Christian tombs, groups of the Virgin and the Infant Jesus, in which the figure of Mary is redolent with youth and divine purity. In the fifth century, under the reign of the Greek Emperor Anastasius, pieces of money were stamped with the monogram of Mary, surrounded with stars; a homage which continued under a great number of his successors, among whom was the Empress Theophania, who had the image of Mary engraven on her coins, the head encircled with rays, with the inscription "Mother of God." From the fifth century to our day, it is well known how the arts have multiplied the testimonies of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. It is true, that at a certain epoch, they fell into singular errors, as, for example, making black statues of the Mother of God; but the works, although of bad taste, are none the less proofs of the faith and piety of those times which are called the Dark Ages, which produced by their incomparable vitreous paintings and magnificent churches dedicated to God under the invocation of Mary, works of which modern civilization possesses not the secret, and would even want the courage to undertake.

Let us not, however, suppose that churches consecrated to Mary, date only from the Middle Ages. In the year 224, Pope Calixtus I. had a chapel erected in the most populous part of Rome, under the title of "Our Lady beyond the Tiber;" before that epoch we find in Spain the church of "Our Lady of the Pillar" at Saragossa, and in Syria, were many churches equally dedicated to the divine Mother; so that, by an uninterrupted train of monuments from the primitive ages of Christianity down to our time, architecture, inspired by fervent piety, has united its grand and powerful voice to the other arts to exalt the name of the august Mother of the Savior of the world. How beautiful, how truly magnificent a spectacle would it be, if we could behold at a single glance, all the riches of stones and marble, of wood and precious metals, of gold and azure material offered to God by the arts of the Catholic world throughout eighteen centuries, that we might bless and glorify Him for the graces, virtues, and power with which He has endowed her in favor of men! What eye would not be dazzled? what heart would not thrill with the liveliest emotion? what voice would not cry out in transport, "Glory to the Lord who has made all ages so faithfully accomplish the prediction of His divine Mother, 'Behold all generations shall proclaim me blessed'"?

But there is a voice as superior to those of the arts as the moral order is to the physical; it is the voice of eloquence, science, and genius made known by word and writing, which certainly corresponds to the prophecy of the Blessed Virgin. There are very few writings left from the two first Christian centuries; however, we read in the writings of an illustrious Martyr of the second century, St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, a eulogium of Mary, very expressive in its brevity. "Eve," says he, "being seduced by the words of the angel-tempter, disobeyed God, and attempted to fly from His presence; the Virgin Mary, yielding to the words of the Angel Gabriel, obeyed the orders of God, giving her consent to bear Christ in her womb; and by that submission became the advocate of Eve." After him, Saints Athanasius, Basil, Ephrem, Gregory, Nazianzen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, Cyril, Epiphanius, John Damascene; then St. Bernard, St. Anselm, and that great genius named the last of the Fathers of the Church, the great Bossuet, in a word, the most eminent men of Eastern and Western Christianity, have celebrated the praises of Mary, exalted her dignity, her virtues, her privileges, and the admirable efficacy of her intercession.

The Litany of Loretto, as we have already said, forms a grand epitome of homages and praises, of testimonies of veneration and love, of devotion and confidence. It is, then, the most beautiful tribute we can offer to this divine Mother. Hence, in the year 1601, Pope Clement VIII. forbade any other prayers in her honor to be recited in public worship; in 1606, Paul V. in his turn, granted an indulgence of sixty days to those who would, on Saturday, assist at the solemn chant of these pious invocations in the churches of the Dominicans. Sixtus V. and Benedict XIII. granted two hundred days to all the faithful who would recite them with devotion, and Pius VII. granted three hundred days.

By this we see how this Litany has become an object of predilection for Catholic piety, which takes so much pleasure in multiplying and varying the chant, embellishing it with all the charms of melody and sweet harmony.

The art of engraving, which speaks to the eye as music does to the ear, failed not to associate its precious resources with the pious tributes of musical art. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, celebrated German engravers published a series of symbolic figures and images as ingenious as significant, explaining successively to the eye, all the titles given by the Church to Mary in the Litany of Loretto, and enriched with scriptural texts applicable to the spiritual and literal sense.

May the author of these meditations, O Mary, not fail in the mission which providential circumstances have assigned to him! It will, no doubt, be sweet and very sweet to pour out my soul before thee, and in thine honor, and to make known more and more all that is grand, good, holy, compassionate, and glorious in the Mother of our Divine Savior. But how can I speak worthily of thee, when others have written so many beautiful and touching pages? How dare I make the attempt, when St. Bernard has said that nothing alarmed him so much as to speak of thy grandeur and glory?

I will attempt it, however, O Mary, thou whom I delight to call my good and amiable Mother; I will attempt it through love of thy Divine Son, who places His glory in thine own; I will attempt it through love for thee, O Masterpiece of the Most High, lively image of His adorable perfections; I will attempt it with the confidence of a child who labors for his mother, and under her eyes, and who expects aid and help from her tenderness. To thee, therefore, I devote my mind, my heart, and my pen, O holy Mary; to thee I dedicate this feeble testimony of my respect, admiration, and confidence, and of my love and filial tenderness.

A MONUMENT TO THE GLORY OF MARY.

The Litany of the Most Holy Virgin,

ACCOMPANIED BY

MEDITATIONS.

MEDITATIONS ON THE LITANY

OF THE

BLESSED VIRGIN.

MEDITATION I.

KYRIE ELEISON!

Lord, have mercy on us!

WHY does the Church require that we send up sighs of prayer to God before the several invocations which we address to Mary? It is to remind us of that truth of faith so forcibly expressed by St. Paul: "For of Him and by Him and in Him are all things: to Him be glory forever."* Yes, certainly, this most august creature, adorned with every virtue, brilliant in power and glory, is nothing before Him, nothing without Him, nothing but by Him. If the Blessed Virgin can so wonderfully aid us by her protection, it is to Him we owe this inestimable advantage; from Him alone comes that power, from Him alone all the graces that flow upon us. The aim of the Church is, also, to inspire us with a high idea of the supreme greatness of God, a lively and profound sentiment of respect, of religious fear, a pious subjection of all our faculties before "Him who is."* He alone is independent; all that wills and thinks, all that breathes and lives, all that exists, owes to Him, will, thought, breath, life, being and preservation of being. Alone self-existent, the "Blessed and only Mighty,"† "who alone hath immortality,"‡ "who alone doth wonderful things,"§ "who alone is great, alone eternal,"|| alone "the beginning and the end,"¶ besides whom "there is no other God."** He alone merits the title of "Lord" by excellence, and by this title the Church wishes to excite our faith in Him whom we have the immense honor to address. Ah! let us feel our extreme nothingness in His presence, our inexpressible nothingness as creatures before His infinite greatness as Creator; and imploring Him, let us cast ourselves at the feet of His supreme majesty, and with all humility and annihilation, with respect and adoration, acknowledge with all the powers of our souls, that we are but "dust and ashes";* that in His presence "we are nothing";† that we do not deserve to speak to Him, even by the mute adoration of the heart. Why, again, does the Church in this first invocation of the Lord, make us say as if uttering a cry of distress, "Have mercy on us!"? It is, in reality, because we are deserving of pity; it is because our misery is profound and almost immeasurable. In our body, frailty, infirmity, pain, and, at times, sufferings almost intolerable; in our souls, wearisomeness, grief, bitter sadness, violent passions, darkness of intellect, disorderly affections of the heart, dangers, shameful inclinations, ignominious disorders of the senses; within and without us, numerous enemies of our eternal salvation; in our will, weakness, indecision, often, and too often, cowardice, drowsiness, and even fatal lethargy. O, yes, once again, we are deserving of pity; our misery is inexpressible. At each moment we are exposed to the risk of losing our souls, of falling into misfortune, great, hopeless, immeasurable and eternal. May we not then cry out with St. Teresa,

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* I Rom. xi, 36.

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* Exod. iii, 14. † I Tim. vi, 15. ‡ I Tim. vi, 16. § Ps. lxxi, 18. || II Macc. i, 25. ¶ Apoc. xxii, 13. ** Deut. xxxii, 39.

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* Gen. xviii, 27. † Ps. xxxviii, 7.

"Alas, O Lord! while this mortal life endures, the eternal is always in peril. O life, enemy of my happiness, why is it not given me to end thee? I bear thee because my God wills it; I take care of thee, because thou belongest to my God; but do not betray me and be not ungrateful. Alas, O Lord! how long shall my exile last? It is true that time itself is short for the gaining of eternity, but one single day or hour is too long for those who fear to offend thee, and who do not even know when they do offend thee!" We also have good reason to cry out with the Apostle, driven by the tempest: "Lord, save us, we perish";* and with our mother the Church, "Lord, have mercy on us!" It behooves us always to pronounce these words with a lively sentiment of the need we have of a divine commiseration and of an infinite mercy, which surpasses the boundless extent and depth of our misery. Let us prostrate ourselves before the infinite majesty of the Lord; let us say, in all humility, as the poor reduced to indigence, as the sick on a bed of excruciating pain, as the shipwrecked who have death before their eyes:

Sovereign Being, Being by excellence, from the throne of thy Almighty greatness, deign to listen to our voice. It is the cry of infirmity, the cry of want, of grief and peril; the cry of a heart that invokes thee, that implores thy omnipotence and infinite bounty; the cry of that faith which enables us to see in thee the God of mercy,* and which prompts us to say, "Lord, have mercy on us!" It is the cry of faith which enables us to behold in heaven, near the throne of thy glory, a mother whom the Church would have us to call "Mother of Mercy,"† a mother of whom thou hast willed that all nations of the earth should publish the praises, even as thine own; a mother to whom it is so sweet to raise our accents "of benediction,"‡ which return upon our heads like the dew of grace and divine benedictions; a mother who prays for us, and with whom we unite in repeating to thee,

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* Matt. viii, 25.

Lord, have mercy on us!

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* Esdras. ix, 31. † Habac. iii, 3. ‡ Num. xxiv, 9.

MEDITATION II.

CHRISTE ELEISON!

Christ, have mercy on us!

THE soul which deeply feels her misery and regards the majesty of God, from whom alone she can expect health, strength, and salvation, implores Him with fear and trembling; she remains as one annihilated at the feet of His greatness. The Church raises our courage in the second invocation, wherein she veils, as it were, the infinite distance between God and His creatures, making us behold Him whom we address, under a point of view which brings Him near to us and opens our hearts to hope. What, in reality, does the name of Jesus convey to the ear of Catholic faith? "The Word made flesh, who dwelt amongst *us*, full of grace and truth."[*] Mediator between God and man;[†] the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world;* who was made like us subject to all kinds of misery, sin excepted;† who became like us that he might sympathize with us as a compassionate brother,‡ having been the companion of unfortunate mankind, "the great high-priest who hath penetrated the heavens, Jesus the Son of God";§ who holds the key of David, "he that openeth, and no man shutteth."‖ Placing on our lips the name of this divine Pontiff, the Church then proposes to us the motive best calculated to dilate our hearts oppressed by fear; she invites them in the most efficacious manner to abandon themselves to sentiments of Christian hope, which keep the soul as far from despair as from presumption. How can we presume on the goodness of God, when we know that "to blot out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, it was necessary that Jesus Christ should nail it to the cross"?¶ How can we despair on account of our frailty, or of the pardon of our sins, when we believe that "God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting"?** Ah! we do not sufficiently prize this faith in Jesus Christ: we value too lightly its admirable advantages. It is a supernatural gift which exceeds not only the strength of our frail nature, but all human ideas and all the good desires that we can form. It is a gift, without which it is impossible to attain eternal happiness, for "without faith it is impossible to please God,"* and how can one who does not please God be judged worthy of the participation of His eternal happiness? It is a gift which is worth no less than life everlasting, the eternal possession of the Sovereign Good; for our Divine Master has said that to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only true God, as well as Him that sent Him, is life everlasting;† and is it not, even in this world, the only true life? "He who hears my word, and believes in Him who has sent me," says the Man-God, "has passed from death to life."‡ The life of those then who do not believe in our Savior Jesus, is but death. In reality, to be the slave of the "prince of darkness,"§ to be deprived of the infallible light in the midst of the cruel uncertainties of the intellect, of the duties of man and his destiny; to be without a guide, without a pilot amidst dangers, without consolation amidst the sorrows of this earth, without strength against the violence of passions, of misfortunes, of anguish;

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[*] John i, 14. [†] I Tim. ii, 5, 6.

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* John i, 29. † Heb. iv, 15. ‡ Heb. ii, 17. § Heb. iv, 15. ‖ Apoc. iii, 7. ¶ Collos. ii, 14. ** John iii, 16.

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* Heb. xi, 6. † St. John xvii, 3. ‡ St. John v, 24. § Ephes. vi, 12.

to be deprived of the sweet and pure teachings of the Incarnate Word, of the incomparable power of His example, of the inexhaustible resources of his merits, of the glorious hope of which His word is the pledge. Alas! what a deplorable situation! Under what obligations are we to our Lord for having bestowed on us this inestimable treasure of faith!

O Jesus, O Eternal Priest, Adorable Pontiff, Adorable Victim of our salvation, it is thou who hast given us the faith we have in thee; be thou a thousand times adored; may each palpitation of our hearts bless thee! What thanksgivings can ever equal the favor bestowed on us? "a favor which thou hast not granted to many nations,"* who yet "sit in darkness and the shadow of death!"† Ah! deign "to perfect what thou hast commenced in us;"‡ deign to make fruitful the gift we have received from thy infinite liberality. "Help our unbelief,"§ make it work by charity.|| It is true we are guilty and ungrateful, but are not we "thy brethren"¶ for whom thou hast shed the last drop of thy blood? Moreover, behold thy divine Mother between thee and us; under her protection we have taken refuge in our distress. Is not the voice of Mary more powerful with thy heart, than that of Bethsabee was formerly with the heart of Solomon? And if that prince said to his mother, "Ask, for I must not turn away thy face,"* how much more wilt thou listen to the entreaties of her, a few words from whom sufficed to obtain thy first miracle.† She now interposes her prayers "to defend us from the burning arrows of the Lord,"‡ which thy adorable heart yearns to see changed by our compunction into arrows inflamed with divine love, as formerly in her apparition to St. Dominic, she showed him to thee, uniting his zeal to that of St. Francis of Assisium, and thus appeased thy justice, irritated against mankind. Full of confidence in her power as a mother, we presume to say, "from the depths of our abyss,"§

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* Ps. cxlvii, 9. † St. Luke i, 79. ‡ Ps. lxvii, 29. § St. Mark ix, 23. || Gal. v, 6. ¶ St. John xx, 17.

Christ, have mercy on us!

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* III Kings ii. 20. † John ii, 34. ‡ Job vi, 4. § Ps. cxxix, .1

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MEDITATION III.

KYRIE ELEISON!

Lord, have mercy on us!

NOW that our hearts are penetrated with sentiments of hope, the Church, exciting our faith in the Divine Mediator, makes us repeat, "Lord, have mercy on us!" This is because the adorable name of Jesus Christ having been once piously invoked, that of "Lord," which we give to God, need no longer be formidable to us. If the Man-God deign to cover us with His infinite merits as with a buckler, can we yield to excessive fear before His supreme majesty? Shall we act like Adam, who, after his sin, became as one bereft of reason, seeking, in his fear, to hide himself from the presence of God,* as if he knew not, that "to Him no creature is invisible, that all things are naked and open to His eyes,† that for Him the night has no darkness but is as bright as the noonday?* Ah! why not rather, in the name of this sweet Savior, speak to this Sovereign Master with the confidence of a child, as it was He who "sent his only Son," that we might become His adopted children, and "hath sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father!"†

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* Gen. iii, 10. † Heb. iv, 13.

What a sublime honor! what an inestimable benefit is this bestowed upon guilty mankind! that a God from whom we deserve only eternal reprobation, was not contented with redeeming us, with rescuing us from perdition by the death of His only Son, but willed that we should be called His children and be such in reality.‡ See then to what an extent He has carried His paternal love;§ see the value of the merits of Christ. They have admirably "reconciled all things;"‖ they have made men the cherished children of God, when His infinite sanctity and justice had rejected them even to the gates of hell! It is true that we have been unmindful of the high dignity conferred on us by Baptism; it is true that we have lessened, by faults which did not cause the death of the soul,¶ or have even lost by mortal sin the rights to this beautiful title, but we have not lost that of relying on the merits of our Savior, to reascend by the means which He has designed to apply to us, to the signal honor from which we may have fallen. The infinite treasure of His mortal life, of His sufferings and immolation on Calvary, Jesus Christ has placed in our hands, He has given it, and, in some way, made it our inalienable property; and even to our last breath we may make use of it to implore the Lord for the graces we need, for Jesus Christ has said: "If you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it to you."* Ah! with what honor, riches and power has He been pleased to endow the Christian soul! and what heart animated by faith, will not find its happiness in repeating the sublime accents of holy Job: "What is man that thou shouldst magnify him?"†

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* Ps. cxxxviii, 11. † Golat. iv, 4. 5, 6. ‡ St. John iii, 1.
§ St. John. iii, 1. ‖ Colloss i, 20. ¶ St. John. v, 16.

In repeating to God, "Lord, have mercy on us!" let us interiorly prostrate ourselves to the dust; let us be seized with admiration and mute astonishment, knowing that we may, at every moment, speak to so great a God, and that He deigns to listen to the prayers and sighs of His creatures deformed by the disorders of sin. In the meantime, let us pour out our hearts in the bosom of a Father full of tenderness for His children. For while we unite ourselves to Jesus and appear before God in the person of His adorable Son, it is impossible that the cry of the heart which incessantly claims His mercy and help, should not be favorably heard. Our voice, united to that of our Divine Mediator, changes, as it were, its nature, weak, unworthy and even defiled, to participate in the strength, purity, sanctity and divine efficacy of the voice of Jesus.

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* St. John. xvi, 23. † Job. vii, 17.

O Lord! it is in the name and by the merits of our Mediator, whom, in thy ineffable charity, thou didst give us, it is in Him and by Him that in thy sight we pour out our prayer and before thee declare our anguish,* crying out, "Lord, have mercy on us!" We are no more thy servants, but thy sons and co-heirs of Jesus Christ,† having, therefore, confidence to enter thy sanctuary by the blood of Christ.‡ We are His brethren; He is the "first-born,"§ but we are His co-heirs.‖ It is then with confidence that we present ourselves before the throne of grace to obtain mercy,¶ and we supplicate thee to have mercy on us as thou wouldst on Him if He were in the same necessity and peril.

O Lord! it is no longer we, but our Divine Brother himself, who says by our heart and tongue, "have mercy on us!" and with Him, his blessed

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* Ps. cxli, 1. † Gal. iv, 7. ‡ Heb. x, 19. § Rom. viii, 29
‖ Rom. viii, 17. ¶ Heb. iv, 16.

Mother, that beloved daughter of heaven. Does not she say that she is our "sister?"[*] that she is like us according to the flesh?[†] that of her was born Christ,[‡] the invincible "Lion of the tribe of Juda,"[§] who has triumphed over death by His resurrection, over the corruption of the world by His adorable purity and infinite sanctity, over Satan by the power and glory of His cross?

In the name of this divine Savior, and in union with Mary we again cry out,

Lord, have mercy on us!

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[*] Gen. xii, 13. [†] Rom. ix, 3. [‡] St. John v, 2. [§] Apoc. v, 5.

MEDITATION IV.

CHRISTE, AUDI NOS!

Christ, hear us!

THE more we unite our hearts and voices to the heart and voice of Jesus to implore the divine goodness and mercy, the more will our prayers ascend to the throne of the Eternal Father as "an oblation of sweet odor."* In order, then, the more powerfully to excite our faith and confidence in this Divine Mediator of the New Testament,† who can always save those who approach to "God by His mediation,"‡ and that we may intimately participate in the admirable dispositions of His adorable heart, solemnly praying on the eve of His death for "those who were to believe in Him,"§ we address ourselves to Him again, supplicating that he *hear us.* Not because His ear is not always open to us, nor that He would reject the prayer of those whom He has loved more than Himself, but we beg Him to hear us as a good father would hear his children, a good mother, the cherished fruit of her womb. How ungrateful soever we may have been towards Him, we ask that ear of the heart which attends with tender interest to a beloved voice, which answers it with such benevolence and love that it establishes between Him and the Christian soul an ineffable union of sentiments, worthy of the admiration of the angels.

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* Ephes. v, 2. † Heb. ix, 15. ‡ Heb. vii, 25. § St. John xvii, 20.

Ah! thrice happy the soul, who, possessing the inestimable gift of sanctifying grace, may speak to Jesus as to a friend, as the spouse of the Canticle to her beloved and adorable Spouse. Thrice happy the soul who can say with just confidence, "My beloved is mine, and I am his"; * and who, in her intimate converse with the divine Jesus, is worthy to hear these consoling, celestial words: "Let thy voice sound in my ears, for thy voice is sweet."† But, alas! our want of faith and love too frequently deprive us of those delightful communications with our God. We divide with others a heart that belongs to Him by so many titles, and of which he is the sovereign Master; we obstinately indulge our passions and natural inclinations, which, though

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* Cant. ii, 16. † Cant. ii, 14.

slight faults, are yet displeasing to Him, and interfere with that absolute right which He has to be preferred before all without reserve; and He has but too justly punished us by a privation of those priceless favors. Let us not, however, be discouraged if our weakness and infirmity forbid us to hope for those sweet and ineffable communications with Jesus, yet we may and ought to aspire to enter the recesses of His adorable heart, there to enjoy His friendship, to persevere in grace, to live and die in His holy love. Ah, let us strive with the utmost care to avoid all that might not only sever, but even loosen the sacred bond which unites us to this divine Savior; let us even employ our zeal in strengthening it from day to day, from hour to hour, and may we die in this holy exercise of a truly Christian heart!

O Jesus, who "knowest so well how to be a friend," who art so admirable in the effusions of thy love towards the heart thou findest void of creatures and self, be thou glorified on earth as thou art in heaven, for bestowing thy love on souls so unworthy! May those who have the happiness of tasting and seeing how sweet thou art* in thy divine communications, unite in singing with transport, the name and heart of their adorable Spouse.

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* Ps. xxxiii, 9.

But, allow those who can only at a distance admire the ineffable mysteries of thy love, to celebrate, at least, with lively sentiments of gratitude, the incomparable goodness with which thou deignest to listen to the miserable accents of their prayers. O good and amiable Jesus! we seem to hear thee cry from the highest heavens: "I have heard the cries and groans of the children of the new Israel;"* I will hear them favorably, I will be propitious to them.† With all the fervor of our hearts we beseech thee to preserve us from displeasing thee or losing thy divine grace, and should we be so unhappy as to fall again, we presume to supplicate thee beforehand to save us from the fatal consequences of the privation of thy divine love. How great is the favor which we ask! But it is Mary, our Mother, who bears the humble vows of her children to the throne of thy mercy; ah! deign for her sake, to preserve us from all sin and the just rigors of thy outraged love; preserve us from impure love, and all that is displeasing to thee; preserve us from all evils of soul and body, ward off from us the thunderbolts of thy justice, and preserve us from a sudden and unprovided death.

Deign, oh, deign to grant us this grace: "in life and in death,"

"Christ, hear us!"

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* Exod. vi, 5. † Paralip. vii, 14.

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MEDITATION V.

CHRISTE, EXAUDI NOS!

Christ, graciously hear us!

IT IS not sufficient to have said to Jesus, "hear us," the Church repeats the adorable name of Christ, and adds, "graciously hear us!" Why repeat a name which has just been uttered? It is, because a name so sweet and tender, a name of help and consolation, of benediction and salvation, can be repeated without danger of weariness or disgust; on the contrary, the more frequently it strikes the ear, the more does it bear with it unction, sweetness, and inexpressible delight. It is, because, unhappy and degraded children as we are, since the fall of our first parents, exiled travellers on the stormy ocean of life, hourly exposed to peril and shipwreck, we cannot too often have recourse to this powerful name.

Ah! when we know that this name alone has been given to man, that through its virtue they might be saved; that at this name "every knee bends in heaven, on earth, and in hell;" that by this name the apostles worked the greatest miracles; that daily, in the name of Jesus Christ, the most tremendous mysteries are operated; we can find true happiness only in invoking and pronouncing that divine name. From its repetition we draw sentiments of confidence and joy, a sweet light to guide us safely through the shadows of life, a firm courage and persevering energy against the enemies of our salvation; for the name of the spouse of the Canticles "is like to an exquisite oil;"* "it enlightens," says St. Bernard, "it nourishes and softens, it strengthens and saves the soul from despair."

But why do we cry to Jesus Christ, "graciously hear us"? Had we not found sweetness and delight in saying "hear us"? Have those words lost their charm by the repetition? No, surely not; but the Church wishes to insinuate that Jesus seems at times to hear and listen without responding to our cry. True, on some occasions, He seems to defer the granting of our requests, how humble and fervent soever they may be, that He may quicken our faith, inflame our ardor and procure us the great merit of perseverance; and, as we are but too often tempted to discouragement under such trials, we beseech Jesus to deliver us from this danger. Ah! then let us entreat this Mediator so kind, so benevolent and so devoted to our interest, "to hasten His divine help."* Nevertheless, should He, in the inscrutable designs of His providence, subject us to the trial of delay in granting our requests, let us beseech Him none the less earnestly for the priceless grace of persevering in prayer. Discouragement is injurious to the goodness, to the infinite mercy of God, to the truth of His promises, to the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, the efficacy of which we seem to doubt by ceasing to implore Him when our petitions are not as promptly granted as we would wish. On the contrary, to continue our prayers when God seems deaf to the cry of our heart, renders beautiful homage to His perfections, makes us adore His bounty, mercy, and infallibility, even when they seem hidden from us; pays a worthy tribute to His wisdom and providence although unseen, as if they were visibly shown in granting our demands. Moreover, it causes us to lean on the boundless merits of our Savior, when they seem to be inefficacious in our regard, as firmly as if we experienced their most powerful effects.

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* Cant. i, 3.

O Jesus! who to make known to us the plenitude of thy mercy, hast become "our advocate with thy Father,"[*] permit not that we should cease to implore thee, though our prayers find not their fulfilment; rather by thy powerful grace, wanting which we cannot even "pronounce thy name,"[†] grant that we may redouble our ardor and confidence when thou deferrest answering our requests. O thou, whose tenderness has caused thee to represent thyself to us as the fond mother, "who gathers her young under her wings,"[‡] the confidence we have in thee leads us to deposit in thy adorable heart our pains and sorrows, our evils and our supplications. Ah! through the intercession of thy beloved Mother, grant that we remain attached to that divine heart; through and by her hands we present our petitions; through her we hope to persevere in prayer until she says to our Guardian Angels: "The Lord hath heard my petition[§] in favor of my supplicants; go, light-winged angels;[||] bear the blessing of my Son to those who cease not to cry: "Christe, exaudi nos!" "Christ, graciously hear us."

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* Ps. lxix, 1.

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[*] St. John ii, 1. [†] Cor. xii, 3. [‡] St. Matt. xxiii, 37. [§] Deut. ix, 19. [||] Is. xviii, 2.

MEDITATION VI.

PATER DE CŒLIS DEUS, MISERERE NOBIS!

God, the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us!

CONFIDING in the efficacy of the merits of Jesus Christ, and being intimately united to Him as our divine Mediator, after the preceding supplications, we now implore the most holy and adorable Trinity with renewed confidence.

The Church invites us to invoke successively the three divine Persons, and, beginning with the first, says, "God, the Father of heaven, have mercy on us!" Of heaven? Is not God on earth as well as in heaven? Is not the universe filled with His presence and His majesty? Did not the Prophet King, soaring on the wings of faith and love, find Him equally present, equally adorable on the highest mountain, in the deepest abyss, at the extremity of the sea, in the brightness of light, or under the shadows of the darkest night?* Yes, doubtless, God is everywhere; by His omniscience, for He sees and knows all things; by His omnipotence, for He has but to will, and all is accomplished; nonentity itself obeys Him.

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* Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

He is omnipresent by His essence, which is infinite, and infinity knows neither distance, measure, nor limit. From Him we have received our being, motion, and life.* He surrounds us, He penetrates us by His omniscience, power, and invisible essence, as does the sun the crystal with his rays. Unhappy then would we be, did we regard heaven as a foreign and distant country, where the sound of our voice in prayer could not be heard! We would fall into a capital error by isolating God from this earth, and render our unhappy condition of children of Adam even worse than it is. No, certainly; God is not removed from us. He is in us, we are in Him. To send to His throne the sighs and groans of our exile, needs no effort. He, to whom we cry for mercy, is more intimately present to us than we are to ourselves. Why, then, I repeat, why these words, "God the Father of heaven"? Ah! it is because God has, in that happy abode, prepared a delightful place for His elect, a permanent home, an eternal kingdom, where He manifests His adorable presence to the angels and saints. There He clearly shows Himself to them, for it is written, "We shall behold Him face to face as He really is";[*] that is to say, we shall know His beauty and truth, His sanctity and goodness, His love and all other perfections. Nothing terrene can satiate our desires; however fortunate we may be in the acquirement of the goods of this life, however multiplied and varied may be its pleasures, yet, in one way or other, we feel we are but exiles.

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* Acts xvii, 28.

Again, is not the life of man interwoven with fatigue, disgust, chagrin, and sufferings of every kind? Were then God to offer us only natural happiness in the next life, we would be bound to bless Him forever; we should with lively eagerness seek after that happiness. To be eternally exempt from the evils of this world; forever sheltered from indigence, sickness, and suffering; freed from sadness, mourning, and pain; would not this be too much for creatures, poor, guilty, and miserable as we are? But, O prodigy of goodness! God is so generous as to call us to a supernatural felicity, in which our nature has no share, which transcends the desires of our hearts, the dreams of imagination, which is nothing less than a participation in the Divine Nature![†] Ah! why do we not seek to attain this beatitude? How desire it without the deepest apprehension lest we fail in the performance of the conditions imposed on us for its attainment? Why not cry with all the fervor of our souls, "God the Father of heaven, have mercy on us!"

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[*] St. John iii, 11. [†] II Peter i, 4.

O Father! who hast predestined us to the adoption of children through Jesus Christ,* and hast so loved us as to make us thy heirs, and His co-heirs,† deign to open the eyes of our understanding and heart, that we may know the hope to which thou hast called us, and what are the glory and riches of the inheritance of the saints; ‡ that the view of that inheritance where "thou inebriatest with the torrent of thy delights,"§ may inspire us with ardor, courage, and strength necessary "to run our race, so as to gain the prize,"|| and crown of life promised to those who love thee!¶

And thou, O Mary! cause us to know by the efficacy of thy protection whose beloved daughter thou art! We gladly pay thee that homage of the pious faithful,** "Hail, daughter of God the Father!" This title belongs to thee infinitely more than to the other daughters of Eve, O thou, Mother of the "Word made flesh,"†† who couldst, even when on earth, say to Him, with much more confidence than we, His adopted children, "Our Father, who art in heaven."

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* Eph. i, 5. † Rom. viii, 17. ‡ Eph. i, 18. § Ps. xxxv, 9. || I Cor. ix, 24. ¶ St. James i, 12. ** Gen. xxiv, 23. †† St. John i, 14.

Allow us then, O Mary! through thy interposition to address to Him this humble prayer: "Father, who art God, from the highest heaven, the 'throne of thy glory,'* have mercy on us!"

God, the Father of heaven, have mercy on us!

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* Is. lxvi, 1.

MEDITATION VII.

FILI REDEMPTOR MUNDI DEUS, MISERERE NOBIS!

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us!

THIS invocation to the Son of God "consubstantial with His Father, true God of true God,"[*] recalls to the Christian the great mystery of the redemption of the world, ineffable in itself, ineffable in its marvellous effects.

It is, then, true that by the redemption wrought on Mt. Calvary, the salvation of man has been purchased by the death of a God. He who humbled himself by "taking our flesh,"[†] did not find the sacrifice too great in undergoing, for our sake, a most ignominious and cruel death.[‡] Ah! at what an immense price has our ransom been purchased! what a high value should we set upon our soul! what importance should we attach to all that may add to her dignity before God, or enhance the beauty of "her immortal crown"![*] how vigilantly should we shun all that might be, even indirectly, prejudicial to our salvation! We were lost, lost forever! Through the fall of the first man we were stamped with eternal anathema. An expiation was required, an expiation of infinite value, to satisfy the justice of infinite majesty wounded by sin. But who was capable of such a satisfaction? Man? No, certainly not! The angels? They were pure, exalted and sublime spirits, yet, between them and Him who is infinite, there is nothing less than infinity itself. Our misfortune was hopeless and irremediable if the Eternal Son of God had not become our "Victim of propitiation."[†]

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[*] Nicene Creed. [†] St. John i, 14. [‡] I Cor. vi, 20.

Vesting himself "with our nature," and entering into the world, He said to the Most High, "I am ready for the sacrifice;"[‡] He took upon Himself all our iniquities,[§] delivering Himself up "to be wounded and bruised for our sins,"[||] that, in His person, Justice and Mercy should embrace each other.[¶] He carried His exceeding love so far as to burn with intense desire to suffer and die for us,[**] and this desire was accomplished in His passion. What was the passion of our Lord but a series of pains both of body and mind, of unheard-of sufferings and sacrifices for those who are ungrateful and utterly unworthy of them? Considering a devotedness so well calculated to excite our sensibility, to inflame our hearts with lively gratitude and tender love, let us in silent admiration adore this mystery which ravishes the angels; let us contemplate "this great work;"* let us, inasmuch as our feeble intellect will allow, penetrate into the secret abyss of the merciful love of God, lose ourselves in this fathomless ocean, and surrender our hearts to the pious transports with which it may please the Lord to animate us. Let us again admire "the superabundant riches of that grace,"† which is the source of our redemption.

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[*] St. Pet. i, 4. [†] St. John ii, 2. [‡] Heb. x, 7. [§] Is. liii, 6. [||] Is liii, 5. [¶] Ps. lxxxiv. 11. [**] St. Luke. xii, 50.

Sanctifying grace is so sublime, so supernatural a gift that it unites our soul to God, and communicates to her a divine life which is a foretaste of the heavenly life, for St. Paul says that "grace is life everlasting."‡ This true life of our soul, which the Sacraments are destined to give, augment or restore, when we have had the misfortune to lose it, gives to our actions an admirable power of meriting a celestial reward, unceasingly augmenting our glory and eternal happiness. Yes, through sanctifying grace, our least actions become of inestimable value, preferable to all worldly treasures; by a single secret action of a will united to God, we can merit more in an instant, than all men could in thousands of centuries by the power of mere nature.

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* Tim. iii, 16. † Ephes. ii. 7. ‡ Rom. vi, 23.

Wonderful, oh wonderful! This is all that we can utter.

O adorable Son of the Father! when we consider the ineffable work of our redemption operated through the blood which thou didst shed for us, and the precious fruit we may daily draw from it, well may we cry out with St. Paul, "Thou hast loved us to excess,"[*] and that thy loving designs are too impenetrable[†] to be understood by us; thou art too worthy of praise[‡] for us to proclaim it worthily; thou art "greater than our heart,"[§] which can never hope to repay such love. Thou livest, O divine Redeemer, and this knowledge is the foundation of our hope;[||] thou livest that thou mayst ever make intercession for us[¶] O permit not thy blood, the merits of which unceasingly flow upon us, to become useless through our sins. The voice of that precious blood cries aloud to thy Father, "Save my people![**] my people whom I have purchased!"[††] And Mary thy mother cries with thee, "Save this people for whom I intercede!"[‡‡]

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[*] Ephes. ii, 4. [†] Ps. xci, 6. [‡] Ps. cxliv, 13. [§] St. John iii, 20. [||] Job. xix, 25, 27. [¶] Heb. vii, 25. [**] Esth. vii, 3. [††] St. Pet. ii, 9. [‡‡] Esth. vii, 3.

Ah! suffer not, that, by the abuse of thy grace, we hinder the efficacy of thy mediation and the intercession of her whom we salute as "Mother of the Son of God."

God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us!

MEDITATION VIII.

SPIRITUS SANCTE DEUS, MISERERE NOBIS!

God the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us!

GOD is love,"* says St. John. The Father is love, the Son is love, the Holy Ghost is love. Whatever the works of divine love, consequently, the operations of grace, be they on our intellect or on our heart, they are attributed to the Holy Ghost, though equally belonging to the three Divine Persons. The reason is, that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son by love, and is the substantial and reciprocal love of the Father and the Son. Jesus Christ said to His disciples, that no one can enter the kingdom of God, unless he be regenerated by water and the Holy Ghost,† that the graces of the divine Spirit should be like fountains of living water, springing up in the faithful heart;‡ and the great Apostle teaches, that "by the Holy Ghost" the love of God has been shed in our hearts;* that, He is the Spirit of wisdom and light;† that, it is He who renovates us,‡ assists our weakness, and causes us to pray with redoubled fervor.§ Ignorant and impotent as we are, with what earnestness should we implore the light of the Holy Ghost, "which warms and enlightens, which dissipates the clouds of the intellect and inflames the heart!"‖ How ardently should we beseech Him to grant that we may judge of all things, not by the wisdom of the flesh,¶ but according to that of the Gospel; to direct and sustain our will, to make our conduct supernatural; for this is the distinctive mark of a true child of God, of a true Christian; which constitutes the difference between a citizen of heaven and one of earth; between their thoughts, affections, views, desires and actions. The true Christian looks to God as his centre; to heaven as his home; to his salvation as the "one thing necessary!" Does he love creatures? It is in God and for God; to Him he clings as to the Sovereign Good, the only rock midst the waves of a tempestuous sea. The worldling, on the contrary, turns to creatures, forgets heaven and his salvation, finds his interest

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* St. John iv, 16. † St. John iii, 5. ‡ St. John vii, 38, 39.

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[*] Rom. v, 5. [†] Eph. i, 17. [‡] Tim. iii, 5. [§] Rom. viii, 26. [‖] St. John v, 35. [¶] 2 Cor. i, 12.

in the pleasures and affections which divide his heart, he desires and seeks after all that passes and perishes in an instant, foolishly treasures the frail goods of this life, which, while he thinks to hold them fast, slip from him like a morsel of ice, which melts from the hand.*

The Christian and the slave of the world are frequently engaged in the same works, negotiate the same affairs, undergo similar accidents, but with intentions and dispositions so dissimilar, so opposite, so unlike, that what for one is gold for eternity, is for the other accursed drops, which, far from "preparing him a treasure in heaven,† will but weigh him down to eternal damnation."‡ The former, animated by the Holy Spirit, acts by Him ;§ his whole conduct is something noble and grand, in respect to heaven and his God; the latter is actuated by his base and corrupt nature, and labors for the spirit of darkness, and his awful destiny.

Ah! let us then again beseech the Holy Ghost to grant us to act in a supernatural manner, and never to be so unhappy as "to extinguish the Spirit,"‖ or even to grieve it."¶ With a sincere resolution of faithfully corresponding to all His graces, let us say:—O Holy Spirit! source of life, flame of charity, divine unction,* guide us in the sure way, make us live by the dictates of justice,† give and preserve to us the charity which proceeds from a pure heart, a good conscience and a firm faith.‡ We humbly beseech thee to make our charity increase in light and prudence, that we may be replenished with the fruits of justice,§ and advance from virtue to virtue, until the God of gods shall be seen in Sion.|| Grant, oh grant us this grace through Mary whom we honor and respect as thy beloved Spouse; through her who could say to thee when the august mystery of the Incarnation was accomplished, "God hath given me a glorious dowry."¶ Thou didst proclaim her "full of grace,"** "my dove is one, my perfect one is but one,"†† "how beautiful art thou, my beloved:"‡‡ and how justly may her mother say, "thou art blessed of the Lord, my daughter!"§§ In the name of this holy Virgin the object of thy predilection,

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* Bossuet. † St. Matt vi, 20. ‡ I Tim. vi, 9. § Gala. v, 2.
‖ Thess. v, 19. ¶ Eph. iv, 30.

God the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us!

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* Veni Creator. † Ps. cxlii, 10, 11. ‡ 1 Tim. 1, 5. § Phillip. i, 9, 10. || Ps. lxxxiii, 8. ¶ Gen. xxx, 20. ** St. Luke i, 28. †† Cant. vi, 8. ‡‡ Cant. iv, 1. §§ Ruth. iii, 10.

MEDITATION IX.

SANCTA TRINITAS, UNUS DEUS, MISERERE NOBIS!

Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us!

THE adorable mystery of the Holy Trinity, "one and indivisible," is the foundation of religion, the fountain-head of all mysteries and divine mercies. Therefore, after making us pray in succession to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the Church invites us to cry, "Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us!"

If we be faithful, we shall one day see clearly what we now believe, viz: the adorable secret of the Blessed Trinity. We shall understand how God the Father, knowing Himself from all eternity, necessarily engendered "His image,"* God the Son; how that knowledge being absolute and indivisible in its substance, communicated itself to the Son without division or reserve; we shall know how from the eternal union of the Father and the

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* II Cor. iv, 4.

Son proceeds their mutual love, the Holy Ghost; how this union being equally absolute and undivided,[*] the Holy Ghost proceeds with the same perfections as the Son receives from the Father. But the clear vision of heaven is not for this world, our true country is not found in exile. Waiting till the day of a blessed eternity break, and shadows be dissipated;[†] waiting till the hour of death remove the veil of faith, that we may know God as we are known,[‡] let us humbly adore with our whole being the mystery He has revealed; let us bless and praise Him with all our hearts for having made us partakers of His divine science, and admitted our feeble intellect to the eternal sanctuary of His "inaccessible light."[§] What honor has been bestowed on us by His giving to us, in our sojourn of trial, our land of exile, the knowledge of a truth which dazzles the angels, and causes us to "sigh after the house of the Lord,"[||] where we shall enjoy a magnificent spectacle. Unity in Trinity; Trinity in Unity! What a wonder! Unity of nature in Trinity of persons; Trinity of persons in Unity of nature! What an admirable concord! what a ravishing harmony! Yes, says St. Augustin, in God there is a number, in God there are no numbers. When you count three Persons, you behold a number; when you ask what it is, there is no number; it is said there is only one God. Inasmuch as there are three, there is a number; when you ask what is their nature, numbers vanish; you find only simple unity.*

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[*] Bossuet. [†] Cant. iv. [‡] I Cor. xiii, 12. [§] I Tim. vi, 16.
[||] Ps. lxxxiii, 3.

O Unity inviolate, which number cannot divide! O Number so well ordered that unity makes no confusion in it! How sublime the hope of beholding thee one day "face to face"!† How sweet to adore thee now with the certainty of divine faith, and to bless thee for the supernatural union which Christianity has given us with thee!

God the Father, in adopting us, has raised us to the sublime dignity of children of God. God the Son, by His Incarnation and Redemption,‡ has associated us to the Divine Nature; God the Holy Ghost, by "the effusion of charity in our souls,"§ has established between God and us "an admirable intercourse."|| Oh let us estimate these divine relations at their just value, and live in a manner suited to the nobility and grandeur of our dignity!

May we understand and feel how much God has exalted us; how much beneath us is all that is not God, being as we are, "children of the Father,"¶

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* In Joan Tract. xxxix, N. 4. † I Cor. xiii, 12. ‡ St. John i, 3. § Rom. v, 5. || II Cor. xiii, 13. ¶ St. John iii, 1.

"brethren of the Son,"* and "temples of the Holy Ghost."† We should in all things conduct ourselves as belonging to a high and noble race, to a royal and sacred order, that we may worthily publish the praises of Him who hath "called us from darkness to His admirable light."‡

O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, "one, and the same in substance,"§ to thee, "one and only God be glory and honor for evermore,"‖ to thee who hast honored us with the revelation of thy eternal Essence, to thee who hast raised us to a superhuman dignity which shall find its completion in heaven in a transformation into thy divine likeness.¶

Ah! in the view of the breadth, length, height, and depth** of thy love for us, what, alas! what can we do but speak with the prophet in faltering accents of praise and admiration,†† and unite ourselves with Mary, who, enraptured by "the great wonders thou hast wrought in her,"‡‡ contemplates thee in an ecstacy of gratitude and love?

We adore thee, "the Alpha,"§§ eternal principle of all; we revere her as the first of thy creatures, most like to thee in the perfections with which thou hast endowed her, and in the sublime affinity of

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* St. John xx, 17. † I Cor. vi, 19. ‡ St. Peter ii, 9. § St. John v, 7. ‖ Jude 25. ¶ II Cor. iii, 18. ** Eph. iii, 18. †† Jer. i, 6. ‡‡ St Luke i. 49. §§ Apoc. i, 8.

Daughter, Mother, and Spouse. Grant that, by her intercession, we may always remain faithful, worthy of thee and our title as Christians.

Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us!

MEDITATION X.

SANCTA MARIA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Holy Mary, pray for us!

THE first title of honor which we give to the Blessed Virgin when invoking her, is her own name, Mary, one which, next to that of Jesus, is the delight of pious souls. What is sweeter than the name of a mother and a mother so great and august? A Mother! What is there in nature so precious, or which so much dilates the heart as her presence? what affects it so deeply as her memory? A Mother! Ah! in this world, God has created nothing like to her in pure and sweet affection, in devotedness and highest heroism of the heart. When, then, we have the happiness of being animated with a lively faith, and firmly believe that Jesus is our divine Brother, and Mary His beloved Mother, ours also; that she necessarily imparts to us that tenderness with which she regards "the blessed fruit of her womb,"* with what pious emotions, with what lively affections must the name of such a mother inspire us! But how much deeper admiration, how much more lively joy does the mysterious meaning of that blessed name impart!

It signifies Sovereign, bright Star, Queen of the Sea;—and to whom besides Mary can these touching epithets be applied? Sovereign! Was it not Mary who brought forth "the King of kings, the Lord of lords"?† Him to whom belong majesty, strength, honor, and victory, from whom emanate all grandeur and power;‡ who, to glorify Mary in heaven, has given her an authority conferred on no one else? Shining Star! Did not Mary give to the world "the true light" of man,§ the "Sun of Justice,"|| whose flame has neither dawn nor twilight, east or west, but which incessantly displays the fulness of its glorious radiance? Is not Mary endowed with the most pure and perfect virtue, whose miraculous virginity is radiant with a glory which eclipses that of the angels and saints? Star of the Sea! Is not the admirable example of Mary a celestial beacon guiding us o'er the troubled waters of life, and leading us to the haven of a blessed eternity? Has not she received from God the power to dispel at pleasure the storms which threaten to overwhelm our frail bark, and this by the mere invocation of her sacred name?

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* St. Luke i, 42. † I Tim. vi, 15. ‡ I Paralip. xxix, 11, 12. § St. John i, 9. || Malach. iv, 2.

The name of Mary, though efficacious and powerful,* is yet inferior to that of Jesus, for the inferior degree necessarily distinguishes the creature, even most perfect, from her Creator and her God; her virtue is derived from Jesus Himself. But it pleased the Divine Son to display His glory by that of His royal mother, and communicate to her name the efficacy of His own.

Like that of Jesus, the name of Mary consoles and strengthens. Call on her, says St. Bernard, in your dangers, in your doubts, in your anguish; let her name dwell on your lips and in your heart; then shall there be no more wanderings nor despair, no more falls nor errors, no more fears nor fatigues, but a sweet experience, a feeling sense of these words of the Gospel, "the name of the Virgin was Mary."† This name has a power like to that of Jesus; it causes the spirit of darkness to flee.

If the wind of temptation assail you, says the same holy doctor, call Mary to your aid.‡ It was of her that God in the beginning of the world, addressed the tempter these forcible words, "She shall crush thy head."§ This sacred oracle still falls as a thunderbolt on Satan, whenever the Christian invokes the name of the Blessed Virgin.

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* Ps. xxiii, 8. † Super Missus est. ‡ Ibid. § Gen. iii, 15.

O Mary! blessed be the Lord who has so much glorified thy name; may thy praises be forever on the lips of man;* let our minds and hearts know the "name thou bearest,"† give us to feel the dignity, power, and sweetness of thy holy name; penetrate our minds with the respect, confidence, and love which it deserves. It is as beautiful to piety as the olive-tree laden with blossoms and fruit,‡ as a vessel filled with fragrant ointment.§ It is so powerful that at its invocation faith seems to behold the fallen angel taking flight, crying out this homage to Mary, "Terrible is the name of the Virgin!"|| O Mary, grant that in our temptations thy sacred name may be always terrible to Satan, that it may be to the enemies of our salvation, "terrible as an army set in array."¶ In our hearts may it never be separated from that of thy Beloved Son; may it be after that of Jesus, our refuge and buckler, our strength and consolation. In the hope of obtaining this favor we cry with the Church,

Holy Mary, pray for us!

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* Jud. xiii, 25. † Gen. xxxii, 29. ‡ Jer. xi, 16. § Cant. i, 3. || Ps. cx, 9. ¶ Cant. vi, 3.

MEDITATION XI.

SANCTA DEI GENITRIX, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Holy Mother of God, pray for us!

A SIMPLE virgin of the tribe of Juda is Mother of God! What a wonder! How replete this title with grandeur and majesty, with honor and glory!

According to the general opinion of men, the dignity of the mother is estimated by that of her Son. What then must be that of Mary, who gave birth to the adorable humanity of the eternal Son of God? Had she given birth to an illustrious saint, she would doubtless be judged worthy of honor; much greater the honor had she brought forth an incarnate angel; greater still the honor, if the first among the princes* of heaven had taken flesh† in her chaste womb.

But Mary, Mother of God! What intellect can sufficiently estimate, what tongue worthily speak of this, her amazing elevation? Who, animated by a lively faith will not exclaim with the angelic Doctor, that "this title has given to her something of infinity, on account of the infinite good which is in her Son;" and with St. Peter Damian say "that we should remain in mute adoration, not daring to gaze on the unparallelled brightness of such dignity."

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* Dan. x, 13. † St. John i, 14.

God has infinite power. How amazing soever the wonders He has created, He can still produce others grander and more stupendous. Nevertheless, I fear not to declare that, omnipotent as He is, He could not have created Mary more noble than she is in her transcendent dignity of Mother of God. Could He have given her a Son of greater dignity than He, who "thought it no robbery to be equal with God,"* and who has said, "I and the Father are one"?† Could He have given her a Son superior to Himself? Mary, then, through her divine maternity, enjoys all the dignity that is possible for a mother; and as God could not create any one superior to the Man-God, so neither could He make a mother more honorable or more worthy than she who could say to that Man-God, "Thou art my Son."‡ Ah! let us honor, praise and magnify this master-piece of divine omnipotence, this perfect work of the adorable wisdom of the Most High.

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* Phillip ii, 6. † St. John x. 30. ‡ Heb. i, 5.

He might have operated the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation without giving a mother to the Sacred Humanity; but was it not fit that the Divine Redeemer of fallen man, should be "Son of man,"* at least through His mother, in order that one of us should pay the infinite satisfaction due to eternal justice? Adam and Eve having degraded themselves, and by their fall, drawn their posterity into the same abyss, does it not seem fit that each sex should share in reinstating and saving mankind? Divine Wisdom has then admirably provided for the work of our redemption in creating the Mother of God. By Mary, the sex of Eve has given to the world a Savior, and by this Savior, that of Adam has redeemed the world. But God has done still more. He has bestowed on us a perpetual extension of the mystery of the Incarnation, as the Fathers of the Church declare.

In the participation of the Eucharist, a mystery which pre-supposes all others, have we not the infinite honor of contracting with God a union which resembles that of Mary with Jesus, and that of the Incarnate Word with His humanity, being in reality incorporated with the divine flesh of Christ, of which Jesus has said, "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him"?* Ah! let us annihilate ourselves before the Lord in confusion, because such an immense favor finds us so cold, tepid, and indifferent, instead of inflaming our hearts and exciting in us a boundless zeal and devotion!

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* St. Luke xxix, 10.

O Mary! we are happy to proclaim with the Church that thou art truly the Mother of God; we joyfully acknowledge that thou art she who didst bring forth the "first-born Son,"† Him who was called by St. Paul," the first-born among many brethren," of those who are conformable to his image;‡ that it is to thee, and to thee alone, can be applied the words, "He who has created me reposes in my tabernacle."§ And as the Eternal Father said to His Son, "from the womb, before the day-star I begot thee,"|| so canst thou say to Him, "In time I have begotten thee." We revere thee, O Mary! we pay homage with all the powers of our souls to thy divine maternity, we offer thee all the tributes due to that incomparable dignity. Obtain for us, O Mary! that we may appreciate the participation which thy divine Son deigns to give us in the sacrament of His love, in thy glory and that of His adorable humanity.

Holy Mother of God, pray for us!

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* St. John vi, 57. † St. Matt i, 25. ‡ Rom. viii, 29. § Eccles. xxiv, 12. || Ps. cix, 4.

MEDITATION XII.

SANCTA VIRGO VIRGINUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us!

VIRGIN of virgins! what more appropriate title could be given to her, who was the first in the world to consecrate the love of this virtue by the seal of a perpetual vow! a vow so precious in her eyes, that she only accepted the ineffable glory of the divine maternity, after an assurance had been given her by the angel, on the part of God, that this high destiny had nothing incompatible with the sacred engagement which she had contracted with the Most High! Virgin of virgins! What title could better express the pious admiration of the Church for miraculous and perpetual virginity? What emblem more fit to represent the favorite virtue of Mary and her richest privilege, than the stem of lilies whose triple flowers tell us so clearly, that she was a virgin at the time of bringing forth, a virgin before and after that admirable mystery!

Is there a flower of more fragrant perfume, of purer brightness, or more delicate whiteness, than the lily? No; there is no more perfect symbol of the most beautiful, the most exquisite of virtues; of the angelic virtue which triumphed with such resplendent brightness in the Virgin of virgins, on the day of the Incarnation, when the angel said to her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee!"* The Holy Scriptures also depict the inviolate purity of the Spouse of the Canticles under the image of a "cincture of lilies,"† and His predilection for this virtue by saying, "He is the lily of the valley, who feedeth among lilies."‡

From these beautiful figures proceeds the voice of expressive and sweet teaching; it is, that Jesus loves to repose in pure hearts;§ that He loves to unite Himself to the soul filled with pure thoughts, pure desires, pure affections and motives; qualities which are to Him as "a garden of aromatic spices."‖ Ah! could we understand how much our Divine Savior delighted in Mary, whose spiritual purity was enhanced by another miraculous purity, so that the name of that double virtue has become hers, and she alone is called "the Virgin" by excellence!

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* St. Luke i, 35. † Cant. vii, 2. ‡ Cant. ii, i, vi, 14. § St. Matt. v, 8. ‖ Cant. vi, 1.

Let us search our hearts: are we objects of complacency in the eyes of that divine Lamb whom "virgins follow whithersoever He goeth"?* Alas! although we are not sunk in the mire of vice, are we never guilty of anything that may offend His pure eyes? How many imprudent, how many dangerous looks, which, without exceeding the strict bounds of virtue, offend the holy severity of chaste delicacy! How many thoughts, recollections, perhaps regrets; how many desires, projects, pictures of the imagination which cannot have for their emblem the brilliant purity of the lily! How many words which breathe not "the sweet odor of Jesus Christ,"† the Son of a virgin, a virgin Himself, the tender and intimate friend of St. John, because, says the Church,‡ "he wore undefiled the crown of virginity!" In fine, how many aspirations of which God is neither the principal nor the end, how many attachments, less of the spirit than of the flesh, which we wish not to acknowledge even to ourselves! Ah! let us courageously root out of our hearts, not only what may offend the divine Son of Mary, but also all that which may not be agreeable to Him. Let us respect our "bodies as being members of Christ,"* and use them for His glory alone. Let us remember that what is hidden from the eyes of men is known to God, who sees and judges; for "hell is to Him without darkness, and the abyss without a veil."† Let us remember that His eyes are for virgins as sweet as "those of the dove,"‡ but as "a flame of fire,"§ for those who dare to commit in the presence of their Creator, that which they would avoid as reprehensible in the eyes of men. Ah! that we could well understand this, and never forget it!

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* Apoc. xiv, 4. † II Cor. iii, 15. ‡ Rom. Brev.

O Virgin of virgins, living miracle of purity, thou who to the divine Jesus, wast, whilst on earth, "his dove, his only one, his perfect one; the daughters of Sion saw thee and proclaimed thee blessed."‖ Innumerable are those young virgins, whom thy powerful example has incited to renounce the world with its seductive pleasures, and to consecrate themselves to God in solitude, or to serve Jesus in the persons of the poor, or to follow thy footsteps even amidst the cares of the world. Queens themselves, in the midst of the pomp of courts, have given thee glorious praises,¶ by the eminent virtues which they practised under thy patronage.

Glory be to thee, O Mary, incomparable model of virgins, who causest men to live on earth in a manner like to angels!

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* I Cor. vii, 15. † Job. xxvi, 6. ‡ Cant. v, 12. § Apoc. i, 14. ‖ Cant. vi, 8, 7. ¶ Cant. vi, 8.

Ah! by thy intercession grant that we may be thy faithful imitators, and zealous lovers of angelic purity. It is to obtain the happiness of being like to thee, and of meriting the approval of thy divine Son that we say,

Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us!

MEDITATION XIII.

MATER CHRISTI, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother of Christ, pray for us!

WHEN we say of Mary that she is "Mother of God," we exhibit in a single expression all her grandeur and glory; but to understand it fully, the human mind should be able to comprehend the divine majesty. For this reason, the Church, after teaching us to invoke her under that sublime title, presents her to us now under one which our minds can more clearly apprehend. Does not a mother appear to us more honorable when her son distinguishes himself by great and noble deeds performed for the good of his fellow-creatures, and when he endears himself to them by his estimable qualities? How admirable then the glory which redounds to the Blessed Virgin as the Mother of Christ! Does not Jesus, even as man, possess all the perfections belonging to His nature? He has received "the unction of the Divinity,"[*] which is personally united to Him. "In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;"[†] in Him are all goodness, sweetness, compassion, and most devoted charity; in Him, the plenitude of sentiments, the most noble, most elevated, most delicate, and most capable of attracting and ravishing the human heart. But who shall say what He has done for the happiness of those "unto whom it pleased Him to be made like?"[‡] Without speaking now of the salvation purchased for us at the price of His blood, how many other benefits has He bestowed upon us! What wonderful progress has He given to human nature! What intellectual and moral amelioration has He brought into the world! What amazing transformations has He effected therein! Christianity prevents more evil in one single day, than human laws could suppress throughout all time; it produces every day more acts of virtue, frequently the most sublime, than could have resulted from all the pompous maxims of philosophers. To whom is due the restoration of woman to her rights and privileges, when, formerly, she was considered and treated as mere household property? Is it not to the Son of Mary? To whom is due respect for children, and the mitigation of paternal authority, formerly so absolute and tyrannical? Is it not to the Son of Mary? From whom has come the abolition of slavery? who has given to the servant a sacred character in the eyes of his Christian Master? who has taught us to behold in all men our true brethren? Is it not the Son of Mary? From whom have we received all help, all consolation, all the good and admirable works of which our religion is the soul and the inexhaustible source? Is it not from the Son of Mary? Ah! even if the Blessed Virgin were not the Mother of God; if Christ, her adorable Son, were no more than the greatest of men, and most noble benefactor of our race, still Mary would be the most honored, most beloved, most august of mothers. And with reference to the supernatural order, what good is there of which Jesus is not the author? Without Him, there would never be for fallen man sanctifying grace, heavenly merit, nor any of those aids so indispensable for our weakness. Without Him there never would be any relation of love or any communication of favors from God to man, none of the sweet affections so precious to piety, none of the consoling lights of faith, none of the rays of hope for eternity. But how blind and ungrateful we are who enjoy all these goods, and yet love their Author so little! Each step of our lives is marked by some favor produced by Christianity, yet we pass them by in forgetfulness! In the view of these priceless gifts, our hearts should be inflamed more and more with love for the divine Son of Mary; yet, on the contrary, we refuse the time which belongs to Him by so many titles; we employ it in the violation of His laws, we refuse to copy His example, we offend Him wilfully. How ungrateful are we! If our hearts are in the least degree sensible, let us repair the past by penitence, and in the future fail not to give Him each and every moment.

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[*] Acts x, 38. [†] Collos. ii, 3. [‡] Heb. ii, 17.

O Mary! who couldst say to this benefactor, "Thou art my Son,* I bore thee in my womb; I nursed and fed thee with my own substance;"† what must have been thy feelings when thou hadst "to wrap in swaddling clothes, the delicate body of this child, the first-born,"‡ of all those who were to become His brethren by divine adoption.§ Ah! thy heart was, no doubt, filled with love and admiration; thou wast happy in lavishing upon Him testimonies of devotedness, of consecration, of entire abandonment of thyself. The ardent words of the Spouse of the Canticles, scarcely sufficed to portray the burning flames of thy holy love, which caused thee to say again and again, "My beloved is mine," "He shall rest in my bosom."* Obtain for us then, O Mary, a share in thy admiration, gratitude and love for Jesus, who never ceases to confer His benefits on us. Permit not that we be any longer ungrateful, or ever deliberately offend so generous a benefactor. We beg these favors with all the ardor of our souls, and repeat with the Church,

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* Heb. i, 5. † II Machab. vii, 27. ‡ Matt. i, 25. § Rom. viii, 29.

Mother of Christ, pray for us!

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* Cant. i, 12.

MEDITATION XIV.

MATER DIVINÆ GRATIÆ, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother of Divine Grace, pray for us!

HAIL full of grace!"* said the heavenly messenger sent to Mary by the Most High, to announce the ineffable mystery of the Incarnation; words so sublime, so profound, that human intellect can never comprehend, nor human lips explain them! Full of grace! Who can fathom the depth or estimate the richness of this treasure? If it be true that the graces bestowed on a soul are measured by the love of our Lord, what soul has ever been so inundated as Mary, who was above all others, the beloved of God? Full of grace! "Perfect expression!" says St. Sophronius, "for grace is given to others in portions, but to Mary in its plentitude." Mary alone was called to the three-fold dignity of cherished Daughter of the Father, beloved Mother of the Son, beloved Spouse of the Holy Ghost; and for this surpassing dignity, incomparable sanctity was required; to perfect this sanctity an unprecedented plenitude of grace was necessary. For this reason, the angel, wishing to do homage to the wonderful holiness which distinguishes Mary among all other creatures, did not call her by her name, although it was, as we have seen, so rich in wonderful meaning, but he saluted her with the title "full of grace,"* a character which most wonderfully exalted her in the sight of the Most High. However, she is the mother of Him who is the "God of all grace,"† of whom St. Paul says, that "the grace of God has appeared to all men."‡ Could a mother who has given birth to such a Son have a more appropriate title than "Mother of divine grace," she to whom that Son has entrusted the distribution of his favors? Jesus, whilst hanging on the cross, gave His Mother to us in the person of St. John, who, being the only one of the apostles who remained with Him at that time, represented all the faithful; § and what the great Apostle says concerning the gift which the Eternal Father has made to us of His only-begotten Son, may, in some measure, be applied to that which the Son has made to us of His Mother. "With *her*, He has given us all things."‖ On this account, the greatest Doctors of the Church have formed in her honor the most expressive invocations. "Remember us, O most holy Virgin," exclaims St. Athanasius, "and for the feeble praises we offer thee, grant us immense gifts from the treasure of thy grace." "In thee, our patroness and mediatrix with God who was born of thee," cries out St. Ephrem, "the human race rejoices; in thee alone can he who is full of confidence in God find refuge and security;" and in another prayer, he says, "After the Most High Trinity, thou art the Mistress of all; after the Paraclete, thou art another Paraclete; after the Mediator, thou art the Mediatrix of the world." "Because thou art the hope of sinners," says St. Augustin, "by thee we confide for the forgiveness of our crimes; by thee, O blessed one! we expect our heavenly reward." "Mary is the ocean of grace," say St. Peter Chrysologus, St. John Damascene, and St. Bonaventure. Mary is that fountain from which we draw grace as from a spring of living water: "the fountain of gardens,"* destined to "water the bed of thorns," that is, to change our hearts and make them bud forth all virtue. "A fountain so full of grace,"† says the angelic Doctor, "that this sweet Virgin has enough to pour out upon all men."

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* Luke i, 28.

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* St. Luke i, 28. † St. Pet. v, 10. ‡ Tit. ii, 11. § Bossuet. ‖ Rom. viii, 32.

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* Cant. iv. 15. † Joel iii, 18.

However deep, then, may be our misery, let us approach "the throne of grace"* which the eternal Son of God has chosen for Himself in the womb of the holy Virgin. Let us implore her assistance in our deepest difficulties, with an assured confidence that we act according to the desires of Him, who, as St. Bernard says, "wills that all good should come to us through Mary."

O Mother of "the Word made flesh, who deigned to dwell among us full of grace and truth,"† we hail thee with the angel "full of grace."‡ Thy Divine Son is the infinite source of all grace, and in choosing thee for His first abode among men, He has conferred on thee the right to say, "In me resides all grace."§ Thy blessed hands are the channels through which this divine treasure flows upon the entire earth, vivifying all that is sterile, and making even the desert bloom as the garden of the Lord !‖ To thee, then, we have recourse in all our necessities: in thee, after God, we place our confidence forever; through thee we expect His mercy, all unworthy as we are; through thee we hope for the pardon of our sins, the graces necessary to strengthen our weakness, but, above all, final perseverance.

Mother of divine grace, pray for us!

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* Heb. iv, 16. † St. John i. 14. ‡ St. Luke i, 28. § Eccles. xxiv, 25. ‖ Is. li, 3.

MEDITATION XV.

MATER PURISSIMA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother most pure, pray for us!

IT was expedient," says St. Anselm, "that the sanctity of Mary should be so great as to surpass all except that of God," for, were it otherwise, it would seem that the Divine Word who was to confer on her the honor of being His mother, refused, at the same time, to make her worthy of that dignity and title, or that He did not create her equal to her rank, the greatest, the most exalted ever given in this world. On this St. Thomas writes the following remarkable words: "There may exist a creature so pure that it would be impossible among the works of the Creator to find one more so, and such is the Blessed Virgin, who knew not sin either original or actual."

God and sin are irreconcilable enemies; the opposition of both is absolute and infinite; therefore we approach to God by avoiding evil, we recede farther from evil as we draw nearer to the "Holy of holies."* Can a creature be found who has ever contracted a closer intimacy with God than His Blessed Mother? Who has attained a purity like to that of the Immaculate Virgin? For this reason, the angelic Doctor teaches that in Mary "the effusion of grace was so abundant, so complete, that she enjoyed the closest union with the divine Author of grace; and thus merited to receive in her chaste womb Him who is the source of all grace."

It would not then be sufficient to give Mary the first place in the hierarchy of creatures even the most holy.

She who approaches nearest to God, is far above them by the height of her incomparable dignity; she is distinguished among them as "the lily among thorns;"† her sanctity is pre-eminent among that of the elect, among that of all blessed spirits, "as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh and frankincense, and all the powders of the perfumer."‡ While we admire this privilege of singular holiness granted by the Almighty to Mary, let us meditate on the hatred which God necessarily bears to all that offends His infinite majesty. Sin, whatever may by its objects or circumstances, is always a violation of the moral order, a real disorder which God must repel from Him, inasmuch as He is order itself, order essential, substantial, necessary and immutable.

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* Dan. ix, 24. † Cant. ii, 2. ‡ Cant. iii, 6.

Sin is a revolt against the sovereign power of God, who cannot, without injustice to Himself, allow throughout His universal empire one act of rebellion to remain unpunished. Sin is ingratitude towards the first and greatest of benefactors, an ingratitude so much the deeper as we voluntarily offend Him who preserves our lives even while we abuse the gift, and it is impossible for us to sin, without turning some of His benefits against Him. Can God, then, do otherwise than infinitely hate ingratitude, since even men brand it with scorn and contempt? Let us not pass rapidly over these truths so calculated to inspire us with horror for having, even slightly, violated the adorable will of God; truths so capable of exciting our zeal, our vigilance and our earnest endeavors to avoid the least evil. Like him "who will not understand that he may do well,"[*] we should be in danger of being "rejected by the Lord;"[†] or like "fools who despise wisdom and instruction,"[‡] we should ourselves be

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[*] Ps. xxxv, 4. [†] Ps. xxxv, 13. [‡] Prov. i, 7

"despised by the Most High and delivered up to our reprobate sense.[*] Let us rather meditate on these salutary truths and draw from them that fear which "neglecteth nothing,"[†] and which has always in mind that great maxim of our divine Master: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is greater, and he that is unfaithful in that which is little is unfaithful also in that which is greater."[‡]

O thou whose sanctity resembles "the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun,"[§] it is from our hearts that we say: "Thou art all pure, O Mary, and there is not a stain in thee,"[||] in thee, House of God, which is all holy,[¶] tabernacle of the Most High which He hath invested with His sanctity.[**] In thee our tender Mother, we, thy cherished children are happy to contemplate that bright privilege which the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has solemnly declared before the whole Catholic world, viz:—that she does not include thee among sinners. Obtain for us, O Mary, that we may understand the hatred which God necessarily bears to sin, with which thy soul was never stained; make us have a horror of that act of rebellious ingratitude, even when it is not so heinous as to separate our souls from God and cause their death.

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[*] Eccles. vii, 14. [†] Eccles. vii, 19. [‡] Luke. xvi, 10. [§] Cant. vi, 9. [||] Cant. iv, 7. [¶] Ps. xcii, 5. [**] Ps. xlv, 5.

Deign by thy intercession to preserve us from all sin ; deign to hear us who address to thee the following invocation,

Mother most pure, pray for us.

MEDITATION XVI.

MATER CASTISSIMA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother most chaste, pray for us!

IS THERE anything greater, anything more noble than that virtue, which, leaving to the mind all its faculties for doing good, disengages it, in a manner, from the servitude of the body which it constantly keeps within the bounds of duty? In all ages, in all nations, barbarous as well as civilized, chastity has been honored. It would seem as if by instinct, Memphis, Athens, Rome, and even the wilds of America, felt the pre-eminence of that virtue, which, raising man above his nature, places him almost on a level with pure spirits. Let us see with what lustre shines forth the chastity of the holy Mother of Jesus. Although like all the children of Adam united to a passive and mortal flesh, Mary being preserved from original sin, was exempt from the humiliating consequences of that stain of birth. Would it have been becoming that the Lord while exempting her from the sin of Adam, should leave in her the inward concupiscence which Eve, whilst in the state of innocence, did not know? Had this been the case, Mary would have been created inferior to the companion of the first man, and the Mother of God would have been obliged to send forth the groan of the Christian soul, "Unhappy that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death."*

"Ah! what truly pious heart will not reject this thought, as injurious to the Son as to the Mother? "That the sacred flesh which gave to the Son of God His virginal body," says St. Augustin, "should after death be delivered up to worms, is what I would have a horror of saying!" But if Mary was freed from the corruption of the tomb, which, after all, is not in itself criminal, how much more fitting that the Lord should preserve her from all tendency to moral evil?

Mary then has been in her body, inasmuch as matter can be compared to spirit, what she was in her soul—all purity and sanctity. We may say of her, applying literally what St. Augustin says symbolically of virginity, that she had in her flesh something not of the flesh, belonging rather to the angelic nature than to ours, something supernatural which caused the King of glory to have "no horror of the Virgin's womb."* But let us not think that the glory of Mary's chastity is less resplendent because she had no combats to sustain. However glorious may be peril when it ends in victory, however honorable may be conquest in a combat of which God is the witness, the prize and the crown, yet it is certainly more honorable to be respected by that impure spirit, whose attacks so often drew bitter groans and sighs from the saints; more glorious to be sheltered from his slightest assault. Such by nature was the prerogative of the adorable Jesus; such by grace was the privilege of His mother, whose eye could always with confidence look down upon the powers of darkness vanquished by her divine Son.† As for us who but too frequently feel the stings of our nature, "and the combats caused by it,"‡ let us with filial confidence take refuge under the maternal protection of Mary. Let us remember that however feeble we may be, we can "do all things in Him who strengthens us,"§ and that through the mediation of His mother, we hope never to be wanting in grace. But let us not rely upon her protection without taking the precautions and means made known to us by faith; this would be making Mary a partaker in our presumption and guilty imprudence.

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* Rom. vii, 24.

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* Te Deum. † Ps. liii, 9. ‡ Coloss. ii, 15. § Phillip. iv, 13.

Let us "watch and pray."* Let us carefully watch over our senses, our imagination, and the impressions of our heart; let us fly from even the appearance of danger; by flight alone is chastity assured of victory. Let us pray, "pray always,"† above all, in time of peril, that we may not "fall into temptation."‡ O Mary, we bless the Lord that from the first moment of thy conception, thy heart and thy flesh have rejoiced in the living God; § we bless Him that in thee are accomplished, in a particular manner, the words of the Apostle: "the fruits of the Holy Spirit are continency and chastity."|| Whose continency will bear comparison with thine? Whose chastity is not obscured before thine, which God has preserved from all attacks of concupiscence, and to whom by the power of "the invincible Lion of the tribe of Juda,"¶ He has given the glory of a perpetual triumph?** Alas! how different is our lot! how fearful may be our eternity from the combats which carnal desires†† and the evil spirits that surround us wage against our souls![*] In the name of thy glory, O Mary, suffer not those who implore thy help, and fight under the shadow of thy powerful protection, to fall in the struggle. Pray for us, that God who gives peace to our hearts, may crush Satan under our feet;[†] that the spirit may not die by the works of the flesh.[‡]

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* St. Mark xiv, 38. † Eph. vi, 18. ‡ St. Mark xiv, 38. § Ps. lxxxiii, 3. || Gal. v, 23. ¶ Apoc. v, 5. ** II Cor. ii, 14. †† St. Pet. ii, 11.

Mother most chaste, pray for us!

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[*] Eph. vi, 12. [†] Rom. xvi, 20. [‡] Rom. viii, 13.

MEDITATION XVII.

MATER INVIOLATA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother inviolate, pray for us!

THE prophet Isaias, to whom God in a vision showed the Virgin Mother seven centuries before her birth, said to the ancestors of Mary, "Hear ye therefore, O house of David! behold a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a Son, whose name shall be called Emmanuel!"* This was, indeed, one of those prodigies which God draws from the treasures of His omnipotence, when He desires to stamp His works with a seal which shall strike men with astonishment, and it is also what the Church desires us to honor and praise by this invocation, "Mother inviolate, pray for us!"

"A virgin has conceived;" cries out St. Augustine, "O amazing wonder! A virgin has brought forth! O ineffable prodigy! Yes, she is a mother, but always a virgin; she has a Son who has no

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* Is. viii, 14.

father according to the flesh; she has given birth, but her purity is inviolate." St. Bernard, enlarging upon these words, says, "If I wish to praise the virginity of Mary, many virgins come to my mind as having a share in the glory of this virtue. If I eulogize her humility, I find some, who, faithful to the teachings of her Son, have become meek and humble of heart. If I wish to extol her mercy, there have been men and women also, models of mercy and compassion. But there is one quality in which she has no equal, that is the union of joyous maternity with the glory of virginity. This privilege is Mary's exclusively; never has creature had, never shall any have, this glorious honor."

This dignity is, no doubt, above all the laws of nature; but if our first father came into the world by a single act of the will of God, could not the same omnipotent will unite to the flower of Mary's virginity, the divine fruit of the Holy Ghost?* Does not the mirror, which, while it receives and reflects an image, yet remains itself unspotted,† enable us to conceive how the splendor of the glory of God,‡ could produce in the world that which is capable of astonishing our intellect? It would appear that the Lord wished to prepare the mind of man long beforehand, for the belief in this wonderful mystery and object of our faith, because the solemn prophecy so long announced to the people of God, had found an echo amidst all pagan nations. Their religious traditions agreed in the expectation that the son of a virgin should be their deliverer. It seems, also, that the mystery of an Incarnate God, being in itself unparalleled, should shine with glory in His birth, as well as in His conception. Let us praise the Lord for the admirable wonders by which He has revealed the mystery of His abjection in human nature.* Let us extol and bless Him for the singular favors He has bestowed on the Blessed Virgin, and let us endeavor to impress our minds more deeply with a high esteem of that generous love, which caused Him to honor Mary with such a wonderful prerogative. Ah! could we but understand how agreeable to God is this virtue; to God who is spirit, who wishes to be adored in spirit;† and that our flesh as far as it is capable, may participate in the elevation, purity, and nobility of that adoration: what efforts would we make to practise this chastity? In the senses, by imposing privation even of that which is allowed; in the heart, by excluding affections, which, though legitimate, are yet too ardent; and in the imagination by banishing even a passing thought upon any dangerous object. How carefully would we control our exterior, so as to inspire others with reserve and modesty, with esteem and love for a virtue which alone can render our homage worthy of the Virgin!

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* St. Matt i, 20. † Wis. vii, 26. ‡ Heb. i, 3.

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* I Heb. i, 3. † St. John iv, 23.

O Mother of inviolate purity! called by St. John, "an admirable prodigy," we love to contemplate thee, "clothed with the sun, the moon beneath thy, feet, and on thy head a crown of twelve stars!"* The sun surrounds thee with his resplendent brightness, the figure of "the Sun of justice,"† whom thou didst bear in thy chaste womb, and who has made thy purity as unalterable as His bright rays. Twelve stars form thy diadem, the symbol of thy miraculous integrity; the moon is beneath thy feet, the emblem of the triumph of thy virginity over all inconstancy and imperfection, represented by the changing phases of that luminary.

We unite in the pious transports of Saint Ambrose, who, at the solemnity of Christmas caused all his flock to sing: "The whole world admires the wonderful parturition of a virgin. It is in this manner that a God should be born." We ardently desire to honor in thee the wonders of the Lord by our fidelity in imitating, as far as our weakness will allow, thy superhuman purity, and that we may obtain this grace we repeat,

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* Apoc. xii. 1. † Malach. iv, 2.

Mother inviolate, pray for us!

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MEDITATION XVIII.

MATER INTEMERATA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother undefiled, pray for us!

TO be worthy of God, the splendor of the prodigy of a Virgin Mother must be unalterable, and the chaste womb in which "the Word was made flesh,"* remain forever incorruptible, as a "sanctuary reserved entirely to the Lord."† It is also an article of faith that Mary was always a Virgin, and that nothing ever tarnished the flower of purity in her so admirably united with the glory of fruitfulness; and that this same flower was, at her last day on earth, as brilliant as at its first appearance.

Moreover, the Church, in her sacred liturgy, teaches that far from losing any of its perfection by the miraculous birth of the Savior, the virginity of Mary received something of divine consecration.‡ Mary, then, is the fountain which always retained the pure crystal of its waters under an inviolable seal;[*] she is the enclosed garden[†] which is the inaccessible dwelling of the Divine Majesty, and before which "the cherubim watch with a fiery sword."[‡] Even had we not in this matter the certainty of the teaching of an infallible Church, where is the faithful child who does not understand that Mary, by the glory of the divine maternity, had become the real temple of the Eternal Son? that the Incarnate Word, dwelling for nine months in the womb of the Virgin, had made it a most pure and holy sanctuary? that if in olden times the places where the ark of the Lord rested were places of solemn worship,[§] this living sanctuary of the Divinity was incomparably more worthy? And again, who would not have a horror of supposing that God could have permitted the profanation of this tabernacle which He had chosen[||] for His Son? that Mary could, even for an instant, cease to respect that God who had rendered her so venerable, or that she could have forgotten that sacred engagement of which she spoke to the angel Gabriel as a treasure which she was unwilling to sacrifice, even for the divine maternity then announced? Ah! far from us such thoughts, which would be, not only contrary to faith, but would accuse Mary of "a sacrilege unworthy of her, and a profanation injurious to Jesus Christ Himself." Ah! rather let us unite with the holy Doctors who have celebrated the incorruptibility of the Virgin. Let us say with St. Jerome that she has always remained holy in soul and body, always a virgin; and with St. Ambrose, that Mary is the mystery of virginity, which glory in her person never received the slightest taint; with St. Peter Chrysologus, that by the birth of the Man-God the purity of Mary was enhanced, her chastity received a new lustre, and her virginity became more inviolate. Let us draw lessons from these truths, which will bear fruit in our souls. The Holy Eucharist, as we have already seen, gives us so intimate, so honorable a union with Jesus, that it has a wonderful similitude with that which the divine maternity produced between Mary and the Son of the Most High God.

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* St. John i, 14. † Ezech. xliv, 2. ‡ Rom. Miss.

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[*] Cant. iv, 12. [†] Ibid. [‡] Gen. iii, 24. [§] Ps. cxxxi, 7 [||] Ps. cxxxi, 13.

Why do we not derive from this ineffable union, this surpassing honor, a perceptible strength and growth in virtue and an invincible power against the seductions of the senses? Ah! it is because we do not sufficiently appreciate the high prize of grace which God gives us in the Holy Eucharist; we too soon forget the incomparable honor which we have received. When we believe from our inmost heart,[*] how can we say without deep emotion: It is not for man, it is not for an angel that I prepare a dwelling, but for God Himself, who condescends to dwell within me?[†] And after contracting such an intimate union with the Man-God, how is it that we do not live in God? After having been nourished with that virginal body, conceived in a virgin, born of a virgin, how can we cease for one instant to be pure and spotless?

O Mary! O new Garden of Eden! where the most beautiful flowers bloom and blossom, what glory is due to thy undefiled and perpetual virginity! "Unheard-of wonder,"[‡] says St. Ephrem, "inexpressible prodigy, incombustible bush, vessel of gold from which we inhale a delicious perfume, alone most pure in body and soul, alone above all innocence, integrity and virginity!"[§] Ah! may we under thy protection, take delight in loving a virtue which has always been thine, and which causes thee "to be forever blessed,"[||] so may we sigh after this adorable mystery, and taste with the bread of the elect the "wine which bringeth forth virgins."

May we, above all, remember that we have had the great happiness of participating in this bread of life, and may we lead lives holy, irreprehensible,* under the auspices of her to whom we, frail of heart, address the following supplication:

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[*] Rom. x, 10. [†] I Paralip. xxix, 1, [‡] Judith xv, 2. [§] Ps. lxi, 2. [||] Zach. ix, 17.

Mother undefiled, pray for us!

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* Colloss. i, 22.

MEDITATION XIX.

MATER AMABILIS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother most amiable, pray for us!

THE sacred canticle, in which the Holy Ghost symbolizes the alliance of the Incarnate Word with His Church, is also strikingly emblematic of all the qualities which give to Mary the title of "Mother most amiable."

In that divine picture the celestial Spouse presents her to us in the most brilliant colors, under the most exquisite and delicate images; sometimes as flowers, fruits, and most beautiful plants; sometimes as precious perfumes of nature and art; again under comparisons full of grace and sweetness, or as ornaments of delicate, brilliant, and ravishing charms. But all that belongs to earth is far beneath that Mother who is amiable by excellence. She is saluted by the daughters of Jerusalem with this cry of admiration, "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?"* Her amiability has the brilliant colors of the first dawn of day, the sweet effects of the moon, the radiant splendor of the king of the skies; and with justice Saint Epiphanius exclaims in pious enthusiasm, "After God, thou art the first beauty; that of Cherubim, Seraphim, and of the choirs of angels, vanishes before thine. It surpasses that of Rebecca and Rachel, the touching charms of Esther, the majestic grace of Judith, whom the Scriptures mention with so much honor."†

Let us not, however, stoop to earthly comparisons. The ineffable amiability of the cherished daughter of the King of kings, "comes entirely from her soul,"‡ and from the inestimable gifts with which the Lord has adorned her. Were men capable of seeing the beauty of a soul which possesses sanctifying grace, they would see it is so great, as to enrapture the most indifferent. If it be so with every soul enjoying that rich treasure, what must be the transcendent beauty of her, who, by her fidelity, her zeal, and fervor, merited every day, every moment, an increase of that celestial gift and magnificent ornament of a Christian soul? What idea must we form of the interior beauty, the supernatural amiability of Mary? From her conception, she had been favored with an infusion of grace superior to that with which all other creatures had been favored. The Lord, in His eternal designs, having chosen her from amongst all others to be His mother, she must necessarily have been, from her very origin, more agreeable to Him than were all others, and that she might not be inferior to her high destiny, she, more than all others, must have been united with God in mind and heart, and full of zeal to increase her treasure by new acts of divine love.

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* Cant. vi, 9. † Gen. xxiv, 16; xxix, 17; Esth. ii, 7; Jud. viii, 7. ‡ Ps. xliv, 14.

No creature has ever, like her, adorned itself, at each moment, with new traits of supernatural beauty; no other has ever possessed in so eminent a degree, the virtues inseparable from such an abundance of grace. Never was there a heart so pure, so humble, so patient, so charitable, so engaging; never was there one so generous, so devoted, so grand, so noble, and so like to the amiable heart of her Divine Son. Let us here understand how we should love above all things, as Mary did, that which is alone truly amiable, God, and every means of being pleasing and united to Him.

Let us learn to despise, as she did, the exterior and perishable beauty which fades, tarnishes, and falls at last under the stroke of death, giving way to what is hideous and disgusting. Let us attach ourselves with all our strength to interior beauty, the beauty of the soul, which will render us amiable in the sight of God, because He associates with Himself in glory and happiness, all the faithful who die in the state of grace. In fine, let us remember that in gaining for our souls the joys of beatitude, we gain them for our bodies also; that all we do in time for the spiritual beauty of the soul, will not only obtain its eternal beatitude, but also the glorification of our bodies for all eternity.

O Mary, master-piece of the most powerful God! how ravishing is thy beauty to the eyes of faith! Yes, thou art worthy to be called by excellence, "amiable to the Savior,"* "for thou art adorned with all virtues, with all perfections that can render a creature amiable."† How sweet, how affecting, O cherished mother! to cry out with one of thy devout servants, "Thou stealest away the hearts of those that contemplate thee;" how consoling to express the sincere desire we have to love thee constantly according to thy merits; to prefer, as thou didst, the beauty of the soul before all things else, and to endeavor unceasingly to increase it by the fervor of our charity. Bless this desire, O holy Mary! and that we may obtain its full accomplishment, we repeat,

Mother most amiable, pray for us!

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* II Kings xii, 25. † Philip iv, 8.

MEDITATION XX.

MATER ADMIRABILIS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother most admirable, pray for us!

MAN has executed all that God has given to his patient industry, and has produced admirable things. By the happy effects of genius he has subjected the elements, even light itself, to his intellectual activity, and has accomplished works worthy of the admiration and enthusiasm of those who value the sublime and beautiful in art. But what are all the masterpieces of men compared with that which God has created by His all-powerful will? And what are the works of creation in comparison with the Mother most admirable? God, it is true, has drawn from the infinite treasury of His power the most striking and diversified wonders, and has spread them throughout all space, even as the dust in the fields; He has adorned the earth with creatures in which are displayed the most wonderful delicacy and strength;

He has adorned the heavens with azure, gold, and silver; He has established in the universe the most wonderful combination of contrary elements, the most scientific harmony of laws, sublime in their diversity, unity, and stability; He has created man who is king of nature, the living abridgment of all the wonders of the universe. He has done still more; He has created Mary, Mother most admirable, admirable in her greatness, in her privileges, in the singular prodigy of her divine maternity, in the august and incomparable influence given to her over the destinies of mankind, which is proclaimed by her co-operation in the work of our salvation; and by the boundless power of her intercession, for all the elements are subject to her. At her prayer, the infected atmosphere loses its malignity, the devastating fire ceases its ravages, the inundating sea returns to its bounds, and the sterile earth becomes fruitful. Ah! Mary is both Virgin and Mother; she is the wonder of nature in alliance with grace; she is a creature, yet the Mother of the Most High;* a servant, yet the Mother of God; she is a daughter of fallen Eve, yet "the true mother of the living."† Mary is a summary of the goodness, charity, power and mercy of the Creator, "the summary of His incomprehensible perfections." (St. Andrew of

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* St. Luke i, 43. † Gen. iii, 20.

Crete.) She is, after God, the centre of the vows and praises of the Catholic world; she is to faith eminently holy, inseparable from the Man-God; their names are daily repeated by every Christian; in their honor, the East and West have united, and will ever unite their hymns and praises. The Almighty "has done great things"* for the incomparable Virgin, and has so glorified her before heaven and earth, that, according to St. Cyril and St. Bernard, "the most eloquent tongues stammer in praising Mary, and speaking of her pre-eminence." But shall we be satisfied with entertaining profound sentiments of veneration for this most perfect work of the Lord? Ah! let us enter into consideration of ourselves in the light of faith. Is there not a prodigy wrought in us? Has not God rendered us truly admirable? Were we not at our birth "children of wrath,"† and are we not become "children of predilection,"‡ objects of the love and most tender care of the Eternal Father? Moreover we mortals, frail and despicable, are elevated by grace and the Blessed Eucharist to the sublime life of the angels, to the divine life of heaven. We are destined to enjoy eternally supreme glory, the glory of God Himself; since it is written that we shall be like unto Him,* and that we shall reign with Him forever and ever.† If we were deeply penetrated with these teachings of faith, how great and generous would be our sentiments towards the Lord! Our conduct would correspond better to these favors and sublimity of our hopes.

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* St. Luke i, 49. † Eph. ii, 3. ‡ Eph. v, 1.

Thou art, O Mary, and thou shalt ever be worthy of admiration, not only for thy perpetual and miraculous virginity, prefigured by the wonder shown to Moses on "the mountain of God,"‡ but also on account of the sublimity of thy privileges, and the superabundance of grace which the Almighty has lavished upon thee, the great power He has given thee, the glory with which he has invested thee alone. Admirable! This is the name by which the Eternal Father willed His divine Son should be called,§ it is also, by the Church, applied to thee, who dost approach nearest to the greatness of the Man-God, and who dost best reflect His glory. August object of the "wonder of the mighty and of the princes of the earth!"‖ thou whose "magnificence is wonderful,"¶ make us sensible of the prodigies of grace to which it has pleased God to exalt us, even in this land of exile and trial, and of the still more wonderful prodigy of that heavenly glory which He has deigned to promise to our efforts; by thy intercession render us worthy of so high a destiny.

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* St. John iii, 2. † Apoc. xxii, 5. ‡ Exod. iii, 2. § Is. ix, 6. ‖ Wisd. viii, 11. ¶ Eccles. xliii, 32.

Mother most admirable, pray for us.

MEDITATION XXI.

MATER CREATORIS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother of our Creator, pray for us!

THE divine act of creation is the greatest and the most astonishing to our understanding. In vain do we try to search into and explore the passage from nothingness into being; it is a secret which God has reserved to Himself, and one which shall ever elude the investigations of human reason. God who is so great, so immense in all His ways, manifests His omnipotence by His title of Creator of the universe; and the Church, impressed with this truth, bids us invoke Mary under the title of "Mother of the Creator," that by it she may raise in our minds the highest idea which we can conceive of her. Mother of the Creator! Does it not seem as if there was a contradiction between these two terms? What! is it possible that the rivulet can produce its own source? that a work can bring forth its author? Who has ever seen or heard of such things? It is true that if there was in Jesus Christ the divine nature only, this title could not belong to the Blessed Virgin. The Divinity is self-existent from all eternity; it has no principle but itself. But "the Word was made flesh,"* and Mary, by a singular privilege, became the Mother of His human nature. "The Word made flesh," is Creator equally with the Father and the Holy Ghost, these three divine Persons having together produced all creatures by one indivisible act of their will. Let us then, with St. Peter Chrysologus cry out, "Yes, truly, Mary has brought forth Him who created the world, and who brought forth herself." Let us congratulate her in the words of the same holy Doctor and say, "O Mary, be thou forever blessed; thy Creator has condescended to be conceived in thy chaste womb. He who created thee has been born of thee; thy divine Father has deigned to become thy Son, and God Himself has taken flesh in thy womb." For whom has the Creator of all things elevated Mary to such a height of glory? For us all. By her He came into the world, and by His coming, He has produced in each of us a change more miraculous, perhaps, than the creation. At the beginning of the world, "God spoke and all was made:"* what could resist the power of His omnipotent word? But in the operations of the "grace which is given us by Jesus Christ,"† God permits our liberty to raise obstacles to it, that thereby we may be more capable of meriting. Thus, when grace triumphs over our liberty, even while it respects its freedom, it shows us something, in a certain sense, greater than the act of primitive creation. This is what St. Paul gives us to understand, when, speaking of the transformation effected in man by the grace of Christianity, he uses the words "new creature." "If then any one be in Christ, he is a 'new creature,'"‡ and writing to the Galatians, he says, "nothing availeth in Jesus Christ but a new creature."§ Alas! we do not find in ourselves this "new creature;" hence we are so insensible to the admirable effects of the divine power which produces it. Moreover, accustomed as we are to know only our human nature, transformed, as it were, from our very cradle by Baptism, we value the benefit less, because we do not know by experience, what it is to grow up and advance in life under the fatal influence of our original degradation, without a remedy and without supernatural aid. Ah! they know it well, those converted pagans to whom the Apostles, after showing them the humiliating fruits of our corrupt nature, said, "Behold what you were, but you are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."* Let us frequently reflect on what we would have been at this day without baptism, and without those wonderful aids, the sacraments, which it has opened to us. Let us draw a comparison between ourselves and those unbelievers, "to whom God hath not done in like manner;"† then we shall, without reserve, give up our hearts to the most lively sentiments of confidence. Grant, O Mary, that we may truly feel the debt of gratitude and love which we owe to thy divine Son, for the change which His grace has operated in us; a priceless favor, by which we pass from the limits of the natural into the supernatural order, incomparably elevated above the noblest moral condition. Reflecting on the grace of baptismal regeneration‡ and its priceless effects, our hearts should be inflamed with love, and we ourselves should be annihilated.§ But, alas! we are cold, ungrateful, and wilful sinners!

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* St. John i, 14.

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* Ps. cxlviii, 5. † John i, 17. ‡ I Cor. v, 17. § Gal. vi, 15.

Permit not, O Mary, that we should any longer delay "to give to God, that which is God's;" to offer to the Creator, whose majesty reposed in thy bosom,* the tribute which is due to Him by so many titles: and that we may be always grateful and faithful,

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* Ps. cxlvii, 20. † Tit. iii, 5. ‡ Ps. lxxii, 22. § St. Luke xx, 25.

Mother of our Creator, pray for us!

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* Eccles. xxiv, 12.

MEDITATION XXII.

MATER SALVATORIS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mother of our Redeemer, pray for us!

THIS is the most affectionate title of Mary considered as a mother; it is that which is most dear to Christian piety. Mother of our Redeemer, that is to say, thou, who by thy co-operation in the divine incarnation, hast given us Him whose name, Jesus, the Angel Gabriel formerly revealed to thy chaste spouse; Him "who should save his people from their sins."* Mother of our Redeemer! O thou to whom we owe Him, whose adorable name each throbbing of our hearts would unceasingly repeat, if we had a lively sense of our obligations to thy divine Son.

To understand clearly what Mary is to us, let us first endeavor to appreciate our relation to the sweet Savior whom she brought forth. Two circumstances enhance the value of a service received: the importance of its object and the generosity with which it is rendered. Oh! then, how precious, how inestimable that which we have received from the adorable Son of Mary! Without the Divine Savior what would have been our eternal doom? To describe it to us, the Holy Ghost calls it, "eternal death,"* that is, a state which shall never have an end, and in which the horrors of death are continually renewed; hence it is an imperishable life, deprived of the Sovereign Good, yet having a continual desire of possessing it, and a certainty of never obtaining it; an "eternal life destined to eternal suffering."† But as if redemption from so deplorable a destiny were little in itself, Jesus merited for us the inappreciable glory of being one day seated with Him in heaven,‡ in the enjoyment of His beatitude,§ to be eternally like to Him,|| that is to say, to be forever happy, happy beyond all human expression, above all human thoughts and desires, and this double service He has rendered most disinterestedly, most magnanimously. What were we to Jesus, that His heart should inspire Him with the desire of shedding His blood for our salvation? Were we like generous brothers for whom it is sweet to make a sacrifice? Ah, certainly not! Were we like tender friends whose lot inspires the deepest interest? Again, no! Were we, at least, like strangers deserving of pity for our virtues as well as for our misfortunes? Alas, once more, no! We were miserable, sinful creatures, unworthy of His least regard, from whom He well knew He would not receive the slightest return of gratitude. What do I say? He knew well that His recompense would, for the most part, be a deplorable indifference, a multiplicity of offences, alas! but too wilful. Nevertheless He has loved us "unto death, even the death of the cross."* To love heroically one who deserves no sympathy, to love one who loves us not, and who will never make the slightest return of gratitude—what a love! But to sacrifice oneself for him in whom we find only misery and insensibility, from whom we expect no return but the blackest ingratitude, who can imagine a purer, stronger, or more generous love?

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* St. Math. i, 21.

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* II Thess. i, 19. † Ibid. ‡ Ephes. ii, 6. § Rom. viii, 17.
|| II Tim. ii, 12.

When will we love this divine Savior as we ought? We detest ingratitude, when will we cease to be ungrateful? We would love a man, who, at the peril of his life, would save our corporal life, so frail, so miserable, so full of tears; we would be indignant at the thought of not proving grateful to him, we would be horrified at the thought of outraging him. Oh! how guilty are we then towards the adorable Son of Mary, who, by the most ignominious and cruel death, has delivered us from a most fatal and eternal doom, and merited for us a most happy destiny. But how much more guilty shall we be, if, after the meditation of these truths, so well calculated to touch our hearts, we still refuse to acquit ourselves of the sacred obligation!

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* Phillip. vi, 8.

Let us in future live no longer for ourselves; we are no longer our own; we belong to Him who has purchased us at so high a price. O Mary, thy character of Mother of our Savior has associated thee in the work of our redemption, wrought by His passion, the cruel instruments of which, by reminding us of His sufferings and thine, speak so eloquently to every sensitive heart. May love, ardent and inviolable love, be eternally given to Jesus, and after Him, to thee also, O Virgin Mary. May our love be ardent and faithful even to our last breath! August Mother, cherished by thy divine Son, whose name of Savior was revealed by an angel to the shepherds, who visited the manger and adored Him at His birth,* how much more is due to Him the title of "Savior of the world" than was to Joseph that of savior of Egypt?† Joseph merited it by services rendered to Pharaoh's people, yet they were not personal sacrifices; but Jesus is signed with that adorable name written in His own blood. Obtain for us, O Mary, that our hearts may return to Him, if not blood for blood, yet, at least love for love; may our love be not in word alone, but in "deed and truth."*

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* St. Luke ii. 11. † Gen. xli, 45.

Mother of our Redeemer, pray for us!

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* St. John vi, 18.

MEDITATION XXIII.

VIRGO PRUDENTISSIMA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Virgin most prudent, pray for us!

AFTER having taught us to honor in Mary all the glories of her maternity, the Church invites us to celebrate her virginity, and presents first to our homage that prudence which distinguished her among all the daughters of Eve, even the most perfect.

From her infancy Mary left the corrupt and tainted atmosphere of the world, to breathe the pure air of the sanctuary. She placed her heart under the guardianship of prudence, although she had nothing to fear from the seductions of the world, for, from the moment of her conception, the Lord possessed it, and did not permit that it should know the dangers or the attacks of concupiscence. When a prince from heaven came to deliver to her a most glorious message, Mary was troubled. She was accustomed to lead a solitary life; so great was her reserve, that "the presence of an angel who had assumed a mortal form, was enough," says Saint Ambrose, "to inspire her with a pious fear," a fear which increased, when she heard him announce a dignity incompatible with the vow she had made, and which was so dear to her heart. Then, O prudence truly admirable! far from entertaining her mind with the dignity of the divine maternity, she thought only of considering within herself, before she gave her consent. She submitted her perplexity to the angel with a modest simplicity: the messenger of Heaven cleared away her doubts, and reassured her: Mary then acquiesced with sublime humility, and entire abandonment of herself into the hands of God. "Behold the hand-maid of the Lord; may it be done unto me according to thy word."* What did Mary do then? Did she not go eagerly to announce the great mystery to her worthy spouse? No; guided by a superhuman prudence, she was silent. But afterwards when "the just man Joseph,"† was, on her account, a prey to the most cruel anguish, did she not speak, when it seemed to be her duty to protect her honor? Oh! let us more deeply admire the Virgin most prudent. She was sensible that to reassure her spouse it would require more than the word of a mere mortal woman, pleading her own cause. Again, she knew that he who "hopes in the Lord, shall never be confounded;"* therefore, she awaited in silence the moment marked out by Divine Providence, which soon fully justified her confidence. Afterwards, when she heard the wonderful things spoken of her new-born Son, far from joining her voice in their celebration, she did violence to her inexpressible love, and "kept all in her heart,"† for she knew that He was not yet to be manifested to the world. When the day of her purification arrived, she faithfully accomplished the rites of the Mosaic law, although "she knew that, in the birth of Him who is the source of purity, there could have been nothing impure." In this, she, doubtless, wished to give an example of the obedience which goes beyond the bounds of duty; but it was also her desire to keep secret a mystery which prudence did not allow her to make known. And from the same motive, when she found her Son in the midst of the doctors, she spoke to Him in terms which gave no reason to suspect the divinity of the Son, or the miraculous virginity of the mother. But who is ignorant that, in every respect, Mary exhibited an incomparable prudence? Who does not know that she was the perfect model of those virgins spoken of in the Gospel, who are ever ready to be admitted to "the marriage feast of the Lamb,"* keeping their lamps trimmed with the precious oil of the love of God and of good works?"† "Yes," says Saint Bernard, "the lamp of the glorious Virgin never lost its refulgence, and its light was always so brilliant that the angels themselves admired it as a prodigy." We, also, are invited to that celestial banquet, and, at the hour when we least expect it,‡ we shall hear the sudden cry, "Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye forth to meet him."§ Let us earnestly prepare for that uncertain hour. We may be called at eve, at midnight, or at the dawn of day;|| are we always ready?

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* St. Luke i, 38. † Matt. i, 19.

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* Ps. xxx, 2. † Luke ii, 19.

Alas, O Mary! we, the children of light, are less wise in our generation than "the children of the world."¶ Moreover, the Lord has given vigilance** to the bird which crows before the dawn of day; wisdom to the laborious insect which provides food for itself in the summer and gathers fruit in the harvest time:†† to the serpent He has given prudence;‡‡ to us He has given understanding, by which we observe, calculate, prevent evil, prepare for success: this gift we zealously use in the management of our temporal affairs, but, in what concerns our eternal welfare, we act as if blind, as if we were the enemies of our own souls."[*]

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* Apoc. xxix, 9. † St. Matt. xxv, 4, 10. ‡ St. Luke xii, 40.
§ St. Matt. xxv, 6. || St. Mark xiii, 35. ¶ St. Luke xvi, 8.
** Job. xxxviii, 36. †† Prov. vi, 6. ‡‡ St. Matt. x, 16.

Deign, O Mary, to obtain for us grace to work out our salvation. O thou, in whom we admire a prudence much more eminent than that of Abigail, praised in Holy Writ for having, by a generous sacrifice,[†] appeased a heart justly irritated, we beg thee to obtain that we may be wise in regard to our soul's salvation.

Virgin most prudent, pray for us!

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[*] Tob. xii, 10.

[†] I Kings xxv, 3.

MEDITATION XXIV.

VIRGO VENERANDA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Virgin most venerable, pray for us!

ALL that is noble and grand, such as science, virtue, or amiability, attracts us more or less powerfully, and inclines us to do homage to it; yet when we find all these qualities combined in a person of the highest dignity, our esteem and respect become most profound. Let us contemplate Mary with the eyes of faith. Can human science be compared with the sublime communications with which the Lord favored her? Ah! to judge of this it is not necessary to speak here of her intimate communications with Jesus during her life at Nazareth, when she imbibed, as it were, "the treasures of science and wisdom;"* we need only think of the supernatural science of her soul, which, even before the birth of our Savior, foresaw her God glorified in her through the perpetual homage which she was to receive among all the nations of the earth.* Where could there be found among all creatures, one so pure, so virtuous, so mild, so heroic? For example, what astonishing chastity to which she bound herself by vow at a tender age; a vow, which, naturally speaking, would deprive her of the honor of being mother of the Messiah, an honor so eagerly coveted by Jewish women, that sterility was considered a reproach. "What sublime humility," says St. Bernard, "which abases itself amidst grandeur, and is not lost under the weight of glory! Mary is the Mother of God, yet she calls herself His servant!"

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* Collos. ii, 3.

And how ardent her charity, when she prayed her divine Son to work a miracle, in order to spare the spouses of Cana the confusion of a scarcity at the nuptial feast in which he deigned to take a part!† Again, how incomparable her fortitude of soul when she assisted at the sacrifice of Calvary! "The disciples," says St. Ambrose, "took flight, but the Mother remained at the foot of the cross. Supported by superhuman courage, she contemplated the bleeding wounds of her beloved Son with inexpressible tenderness; she thought not of the death of the victim, but that by His death, He was to redeem the world." What, in fine, shall we say of the almost divine dignity, on account of which, she is crowned in heaven with a glory inferior only to that of God? "What is there so venerable on earth," exclaimed St. Bernard, "as the virginal womb in which the Son of God became incarnate? what is so exalted in heaven after the throne of Jesus, as that of His holy Mother? Her glory is in proportion to the fulness of grace given to her, even in this world, above every other creature." Mary is, then, worthy of our most humble homage; she claims our profound veneration for her name, her festivals, her altars, for the sanctuaries dedicated to her, for everything included in the special veneration, honor and love due to her. Oh! let us faithfully render homage to Mary; it is a duty founded upon the immeasurable respect due to God. For, if it be true that the Catholic Church is the best teacher of respect due to God, to Mary, and to all that in the least reflects His image, we may also say that, in our holy religion, devotion to Mary, on account of the divine majesty, fills us with consoling suavity. When a pious mother seeks to instil into the mind of her child a sweet devotion to the Blessed Virgin, she calls her by the endearing name, "Mother of the good God," a name which teaches it, that Mary, though a daughter of Eve, of like nature with us, is she through whom God has descended on earth to save us: does she not thus impress upon the young heart a respectful confidence towards the Most High, which keeps it away from the extremes of fear and presumptuous familiarity, and fills it with delicious sweetness?

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* Luke i, 48. † St. John ii, 3.

King Solomon, wishing to do honor to his mother, rose from his throne, went to meet her, saluted her with great respect, and made her sit on a throne at his right hand.* This is, to us, O Mary, an image of the regard with which Jesus honored thee during His mortal life, and of the glory with which He crowned thee at thy Assumption into heaven. Rejoiced at being able to pay homage to one so much honored by our divine Savior, we offer thee, from the bottom of our hearts and with deepest affection, the tribute of our veneration, which, in the language of men, is the highest expression of respect. Do not permit us ever to forget all that is due to thee;† and that we may avoid this misfortune, obtain that our hearts may be deeply imbued with sentiments of respect and love towards God, and that we may, according to His divine will, revere all that is pleasing to Him in heaven and on earth.

Virgin most venerable, pray for us!

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* III Kings ii, 19. † Paralip. xxix, 18.

MEDITATION XXV.

VIRGO PRŒDICANDA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Virgin most renowned, pray for us!

PROPERLY speaking, God alone is worthy of all praise; merit, however, has a right to our eulogiums, provided they are referred to Him from "whom proceed all good gifts,"* and keep within the bounds of truth. But where can we find on earth merit which we can praise without fear of error or exaggeration? Alas! God alone knows the depths of the heart, and frequently, what seems greatest in the eyes of men, is an "abomination to the Lord."†

In praising Mary and proclaiming her worthy of our homage, we need not fear any danger of illusion, or that we will exalt her above her deserts. God has weighed her in a just balance,‡ and made men give her, in His name, incomparable praise. Have we ever fully understood all that is solemn and glorious for Mary in the salutation of the angel? We find in the Holy Scriptures many privileged persons who were honored by the visits of angels, but no where do we find that they were saluted in such grand and magnificent terms: "Hail, full of grace! the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women."* Could anything more honorable be said to a human creature? and "is it not," according to Saint Ambrose and Saint Peter Chrysologus, "an unheard-of salutation, without precedent or example?" Nevertheless, it does not surpass the merit of her to whom it was addressed. It was given by an angel, the faithful organ of the "God of truth,"† who, soon after, inspired the mother of the Baptist to give to Mary praises like to those of the angelic salutation. The Gospel tells us, that not from herself, but by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Elizabeth raised her voice and repeated the words of the angel, "Blessed art thou among women," adding "blessed is the fruit of thy womb;"‡ words which admirably show forth the grandeur of Mary through the ineffable greatness of Him of whom she is the mother. Elizabeth said of Mary that she was "blessed among women," and declares in an absolute manner that her "first fruit is blessed." "O Mary!" cries out Saint Bernard,

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* St. Jas. i, 17. † St. Luke xvi, 15. ‡ Job xxxi, 6.

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* St. Luke i, 28. † Ps. xxx, 6. ‡ St. Luke i, 41-42.

"the precious fruit of thy womb is not blessed because thou art so among all the daughters of Eve, but thou art blessed in this manner because He has given thee His benedictions. Whilst thou art blessed amongst women, He is not declared to be so among men or angels; but is, according to the expression of the apostle, 'God above all and blessed forever.'"* But did not Jesus Himself speak in praise of His holy mother? Having come to teach men to be like Himself "humble of heart,"† the Savior would not exalt in their presence, her, whose Son He was; yet, when a Jewish woman, enraptured by His words, cried out from the midst of the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that gave thee suck!" "Yea, rather," said our Lord, "blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."‡ "By this expression," says Venerable Bede, "our Savior sealed with divine approbation this beautiful eulogy of His blessed mother; giving us to understand that, if Mary was most happy in being the Mother of the Eternal Wisdom incarnate, she was surpassingly so, by observing inviolably His admirable lessons.

Let us, also, give to the Blessed Virgin all honorable praise, and let us with St. Basil of Selucia say: "We need never fear to offend against truth by giving to her the highest eulogies, for no discourse, however eloquent, can equal her greatness." Let us supply our feeble insufficiency by our zeal for her honor; let us profit by every opportunity of speaking of her with the most ardent affection, and of inspiring others with a filial confidence in her protection. Let us, above all, try to honor her by the imitation of her virtues, so that those with whom we live in daily intercourse, may glorify her for what she has wrought in her children.

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* Rom. ix, 5. † St. Matt. xi, 29. ‡ St. Luke xi, 27–28.

O Mary! how can we worthily praise thee, who didst bear in thy womb, Him whose immensity the heavens cannot contain. The "God of Majesty"* alone merits infinite praise, but after Him, thou also dost merit all praise.† O thou, to whom the apostles gave the highest eulogies, which were afterwards repeated throughout the earth; thou whom all the preachers of the divine word have ever taken delight in proclaiming "blessed;"‡ thou, whose name shall be eternally celebrated amongst men;§ ah! since it is impossible that our homage can equal thy merit, obtain that we may, at least, endeavor to promote thy glory and follow faithfully in thy footsteps.

Virgin most renowned, pray for us!

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* Ps. xxviii, 3. † Eccles. xliii, 33. ‡ Prov. xxxi, 28. Jud. xiii, 25.

MEDITATION XXVI.

VIRGO POTENS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Virgin most powerful, pray for us!

IF Jesus Christ as God, is, by His very nature possessed of omnipotence; if, as man, He derived it from His personal union with the Divinity from the first moment of His incarnation, its striking manifestation throughout the world after His resurrection, was the reward of His sufferings and death. This He intimated to His disciples when He said to them: "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth."* This sovereign power the Son of God communicated to His august mother.

The coöperation of Mary in the sublime mystery of a God made man, and her participation in His sufferings and sacrifice on Calvary, must have merited for her the privilege of being associated with Jesus in His dominion over all creatures. Is it not also meet that she, who so long exercised in this world the right of a mother towards Him, and who so perfectly discharged such pious duties, should retain in heaven the influence, which it is naturally the office of a mother to possess over the heart of the best of sons, and this in such a degree, that her prayer, in order to be granted, needs but to be heard? In fine, is it not proper that the incomparable power of the intercession of such a mother should be stamped with a grandeur and a universality worthy of Him to whom she gave birth? Accordingly, we find revealed throughout the Catholic world, the most striking proofs of the power of the Blessed Virgin, exerted in favor of kings and nations. Glorious memory of Lepanto! you bear witness to all generations of the glorious victory which descended from the throne of Mary, to crush by its invincible power the formidable fleet of the infidels, to save Christendom, and with it, the civilization of all Europe!

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* Matt. xxviii, 18

And you, O glorious champion, who, at the head of your band of heroes, exclaimed in the spirit of faith, "Let us march: the Mother of God is our leader," do you not, O illustrious Sobieski, by these words declare to whom you were indebted for your triumph over the numerous army of Mussulmans which so closely surrounded the walls of Vienna? And you also, fierce enemies of Catholic truth, are obliged to serve as trophies of the glory of the Virgin most powerful! The Church solemnly declares that Mary has triumphed over all heresies; and, in the twelfth century, it pleased God to give striking evidence of her power over error.

At that time a formidable heresy ravaged the south of France, desecrating altars and churches, murdering the ministers of Jesus, destroying everything by fire and sword. To that impious and devastating sect was opposed the humble St. Dominic. What arms were used by this new David? Had he not at least the sling of the shepherd boy? No; it was with the Rosary in hand that he stopped, subdued, and gained over the most powerful enemies of the Church.

Who can enumerate the signal acts of the power of Mary in favor of those who have implored her protection? How innumerable the sorrowful hearts which she has consoled, how many fatal deaths has she prevented, how many violent temptations have been overcome through her aid, how many graces has she obtained for those who implored her help either on land or sea! The monuments raised to Mary proclaim her power with a grand, imposing, irresistible voice, those monuments of her glory so celebrated in the miraculous memorials which faith and gratitude have consecrated to her.

And yet, besides all these, how many admirable works of her power still remain hidden in the secret soul? Amiable and holy Bishop of Geneva, we know well that to Mary you owed your victory over a powerful temptation of despair; you also, St. Andrew Corsini, your conversion and great virtues, and you, noble martyr of the seal of confession, immortal Nepomucene, the courage and strength which gained for you so much glory; yet, in heaven alone shall we know and admire the innumerable effects of the power given her by God, to enlighten, guide, sustain and heal souls redeemed by the blood of her divine Son, and to overcome the empire of the infernal serpent whose head she was destined to crush.*

Let us then have recourse to this blessed Mother in our pains, dangers and necessities, and let us impose on ourselves the pious obligation of extolling her power on every occasion.

Yes, we shall ever love to proclaim, O august Sovereign of the universe! that the arm of the Lord hath shown might in thee;† that in thy hand "are power and strength,"‡ that the glory of Jael§

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* Gen. iii, 15. † St. Luke. i, 51. ‡ I Paralip. xxix, 12.
§ Judg. iv.

and of Judith,* triumphing over the enemies of God, is not even a shadow of thine. Ah! deign to shelter continually under thy protection those who never cease to invoke thee. Above all, at that decisive moment when our trembling soul shall be about to appear before the Judge, deign to encourage, strengthen and defend her against her enemies; and at her entrance into eternity, present her with thy maternal hands into the presence of thy divine Son.

Virgin most powerful, pray for us!

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* Judith xiii.

MEDITATION XXVII.

VIRGO CLEMENS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Virgin most clement, pray for us!

WHY does the Church invite us to implore the clemency of Mary rather than her goodness? Goodness has in it something so sweet and so well calculated to touch the heart; and we find in Mary this quality so dear to us, so amiable and so perfect. Does she not unite in her immaculate heart all the compassion of the most tender mothers, all the charity and kindness which tender souls feel for those who weep, who suffer, and who groan under misfortunes? Ah, doubtless, Mary is good, her goodness is immeasurable; her heart is so sensible of our misery, that it is surpassed only by that of her divine Son; but the Church, by invoking her clemency, wishes us to understand that our profound misery as sinful creatures, and our detestable ingratitude to God, naturally render us unworthy of the benevolent protection of that august Mother. Being, as she is, one with Jesus whom we so often offend, has she not much to forgive before she can intercede for us? And again, is not our cold imitation of her virtues, sufficient of itself to hinder her from bestowing the graces we ask of her, if she were not the Virgin full of tender compassion, the Virgin most clement? Yes, this noble quality of magnanimous souls shines forth admirably in Mary. "It is to her," says St. Bernard, "that we may apply the beautiful image of a mortal clothed with the sun, as was seen by the Prophet of Patmos; for, as the sun sheds his rays on the good and the bad, so, also, Mary asks not whether he who invokes her, has been more or less guilty, but shows herself mild, merciful, and kind to all who claim her aid; she, in her extreme charity, is sensible to all their wants and mercies." And how could she be otherwise? "She it was who brought us forth to the Church by her charity," says St. Augustin, and should not this ineffable charity constantly inspire her with the feelings of a mother, whose heart, so to speak, melts like wax before the fire?* "Yes, certainly," says the immortal Bishop of Meaux, "she has always been the same to us, always good, always a mother. The desire of our salvation ever lives in her; neither is it less efficacious nor less fruitful than it was at the time when she gave her consent to the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation."

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* Ps. xxi, 15.

It is not then without reason that the pious children of the Church love to regard Mary as well as Jesus, under the emblem of the pelican, which, to appease the hunger of its young, feeds them with its own substance; and under that of the hen, which at the least appearance of danger, gathers her young under her maternal wing, with the most touching tenderness.

In giving us her only Son for our Savior, has she not given her own blood to us, whom Jesus has honored with the title of brethren,* and whom she herself cherishes as the members of the body of this divine Son?† And like to that mother, who at the cry of her young, runs quickly to protect them from danger, Mary, when she hears our sighs and groans, saves us from all that may be fatal or pernicious. Then, notwithstanding our guilty ingratitude towards the Son, never, oh! never let us despair of the clemency of the mother, but joining confidence with repentance, let us fearlessly cast ourselves into her arms, being assured that we shall not be abandoned by her. Having already experienced the powerful effects of her sweet clemency, are we so happy as to remain still faithful? If so, with how much greater confidence should we trust in her who so tenderly cherishes the "beloved of God the Father, preserved by the grace of Jesus Christ!"*

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* John xx, 17. † Ephes. v, 30.

Virgin full of sweetness, of clemency and tenderness, ah! well may we say of thee, what is said of the Lord, that, great as is thy power so great is thy mercy.† If whilst still on earth, thy compassionate goodness, far surpassing that of Rebecca for Eliezer,‡ led thee to ask of thy divine Son the changing of water into wine,§ what must be in heaven the amazing extent of thy goodness towards us, when, from this vale of tears, we humbly supplicate thee to succor the unfortunate, redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. O thou whose sacred lips keep inviolably the law of clemency,|| thou in whom this noble virtue is like the autumn dew,¶ which refreshes the earth; thou who art propitious to all that invoke thee, notwithstanding our unworthiness, be to us favorable till our last sigh.

Virgin most clement, pray for us!

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* St. Jude i. † Ps. lxi, 12, 13. ‡ Gen. xxiv, 19. § St. John ii, 3. || Prov. xxxi, 26. ¶ Prov. xvi, 15.

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MEDITATION XXVIII.

VIRGO FIDELIS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Virgin most faithful, pray for us!

OH! how admirably does this title of "faithful Virgin" characterize her who was so faithful to the Lord, faithful to her duties, faithful to grace, and to the will of heaven, even in those extreme circumstances when we might naturally forgive the heart of a mother for being overwhelmed with grief? The virtue of fidelity must be something noble and beautiful in the sight of God, since He calls Himself "faithful and true,"* and because He inspires the royal prophet to honor the just with the title, "faithful of the earth,"† on whom his eyes rest with complaisance.‡ If this be true regarding the just in general, with what loving complacency must not the Lord gaze on that Virgin, whose fidelity, free from the least diminution, has increased day by day, rising from virtue to virtue,* until the happy moment when the just Judge placed upon her head the crown due to her merit ?†

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* Apoc. xix, 11. † Ps. c, 6. ‡ Ps. xxxiii, 16.

Conceived without sin ‡ and in "justice and sanctity,"§ by a privilege singular and inestimable, she belonged to God from the first instant of her existence. Far from ever loosening, by the slightest fault, the precious tie that bound her to God, she never ceased to strengthen it more and more until the day in which she passed to her celestial country. Therefore does St. Anselm in admiration cry out, "When I contemplate the immensity of grace possessed by thee, O blessed Virgin! my spirit loses itself in amazement, my tongue becomes mute." "O how beautiful are thy ways!"|| we may add with the Spouse in the Canticles: How sublime have been the ways of grace, O cherished daughter of the King of kings,¶ Virgin ever faithful, faithful in holiness and justice "before God."** If we are amazed at the little which God has been pleased to reveal to us, what must be that which remains hidden in the inner sanctuary where no eye but His can penetrate.†† The Gospel teaches us, O Mary! that thou wast so faithful to duty, as to reject the sublime honor of the maternity, until thou receivedst from the messenger of the Most High, the assurance that this honor was not incompatible with the vow made to God. It also teaches that thou wast so faithful to the law, as to subject thyself to the humiliating ceremony of purification; thou, who by so many titles, wast exempt from this obligation imposed upon other mothers. We admire and bless God for having shown us in thee such beautiful and noble examples; but when we behold thee on Calvary's Mount, so faithful to the adorable designs of Providence, as to triumph heroically over thy maternal nature, when standing at the foot of the cross of the Redeemer, ah! we are enraptured by thy sublime resignation, thy superhuman devotedness. What a Son was Jesus! what a mother was Mary! what indissoluble, inexpressible tenderness in each! Oh! how truly it is said that thou wast "faithful unto death!"* Yes, even so far as to be present, uniting all the power of thy will, at the most ignominious and dolorous death of thy Son, the most amiable and most tenderly beloved.

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* Ps. lxxxiii, 8. † Timoth. iv, 8. ‡ Ps. l, 7. § Luke i, 75. || Cant. vii, 1. ¶ Ps. xliv, 11, 12. ** Eccles. xlviii, 25. †† Cant. iv, 1.

After this act of unequalled devotedness, can we be astonished that it is unheard of through all ages, that Mary has ever disdained the cries of those who have implored her assistance. Ah! is not this wonderful constancy of her merciful goodness towards all who invoke her, clearly explained by the sacrifice which her magnanimous heart has had the courage to make in our favor? If such be her benevolence towards all the children of Eve, who from their exile cry to this Mother of mercy, what will be her zeal for the interests of those who make profession of particular devotion to her, of "being her good and faithful servants"?* Ah! may we be of this happy number, by rendering ourselves equally agreeable to the Son and to the Mother.

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* Apoc. ii, 10.

O Mary! thou didst always bear towards God, whilst on earth, a heart perfect in its fidelity,† and whilst thou reignest in the highest heaven, we have, during eighteen centuries, ever found in thee, after God, a most sweet and secure asylum. Yes, thou art faithful to men in a manner incomparable and superior to all human kindness and devotedness. Thy fidelity far surpasses that of Rahab, who saved the messengers of Israel,‡ and that also of Michol, who, to save her spouse, feared not to expose herself to the resentment of her father.§ Ah! deign to obtain that we may be always faithful to Jesus and to thee, that we may enjoy the happy effects of thy special protection.

Virgin most faithful, pray for us!

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* Matt. xxv, 21 † Esdr. ix, 8. ‡ Jos. ii. § I King. xix.

MEDITATION XXIX.

SPECULUM JUSTITIÆ, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mirror of justice, pray for us!

THE Church, having, as it were, exhausted all the titles which could serve to honor in Mary the Mother and the Virgin, passes on to another train of ideas, in order that she may offer to her new praises

She invokes her first under the figure of a mirror which admirably reflects the refulgence of the divine Majesty.* The Eternal Word being the image and splendor of the Father,† does not Mary reflect most faithfully in herself the glorious attributes of "the Word made flesh?"‡ Does she not resemble Him more closely than do all other intelligent creatures? The Lord ordained that she should hold the first rank among all the works of His hands,§ and be, according to the expression of St. Anselm, "above all that is not God." Could

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* Wisd. vii, 26. † Heb. i, 3. ‡ St. John i, 14. § Ps. cxxxvii, 8.

He do otherwise than endow her with the gifts and merits which are most like to His infinite perfections? This made St. Peter Chrysologus say that he who contemplates Mary without being enraptured, knows not God who made her so closely resemble His own image.

But why does the Church call her "Mirror of Justice?" It is because Mary is the faithful mirror of Him who is called "Sun of Justice,"* whose divine rays warm and fertilize souls, causing them to germinate all Christian virtues. Jesus designates the combination of these virtues when He says, "blessed are they who hunger and thirst after justice,"† those who ardently desire to be perfect, and who labor with zeal and constancy to be justified.

There is yet another signification in this title given by the Church, and one which deserves the attention of all pious souls. The Apostle St. Paul calls "justice"‡ the state of sanctifying grace, which gives us a right to eternal happiness. This supernatural state so honorable, so precious, Adam by his disobedience lost, both for himself and his posterity. But soon after his fall the Lord announced to him, that a woman should crush the head of him who had caused the fall,[*] hence he could behold in this daughter of Eve the depth of his misery which required for liberator no less than a God-man, and the necessity of repentance, without which he could not profit by the grace of redemption operated by the Son of Mary. The angels who remained faithful, see in this privileged creature the mother of Him who is the principle and source of their perseverance and confirmation in grace, for we may say, relying on the words of St. Paul, that it is to Jesus Christ the good angels owe the merit and value of their fidelity.[†] In fine, the reprobate angel beholds in Mary, conceived in grace and exalted on account of her humility[‡] to the divine maternity, the folly of his pride, the misfortune by which he lost his supernatural beauty, and the hideous contrasted deformity which degrades him. At the same time, he sees the turpitude of sin, for which he has had no redeemer, because he fell voluntarily, by pure malice, from a state much higher than that of man, without being exposed to the seductions of the senses, and he is thereby forced to unite his voice with heaven and earth, proclaiming that "God is just,"[§] and "gives to each according to his works."[||]

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* Malach. iv, 2. † St. Matt. xvi, 27. ‡ Rom. i, 17–24; Phillip. iii, 9; Tit. iii, 7.

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[*] Gen. iii, 15. [†] Ephes. i, 10; Colloss. i, 17–20. [‡] St. Luke i, 48. [§] Apoc. xvi, 5. [||] St. Matt. xvi, 27; Rom. ii, 6; Apoc. xxii, 12.

While contemplating in Mary the inestimable favor of our deliverance from sin,* ah! let us be careful not to imitate him, who, contemplating himself in a mirror, departs immediately and forgets his own reflection;† let us rather excite ourselves with the thought, that our deliverance from the bonds of sin has made us happy servants of justice,‡ and that as we have abused our faculties in doing evil, so much the more should we henceforward labor to employ them for our sanctification.

O thou, in whom "as in a mirror, we behold"§ the reflection of the attributes of the Most High, let some salutary rays of the splendor of thy sublime virtues fall upon our guilty souls. Deign by thy sweetness to correct our sensitiveness and impatience; by thy humility to put down our proud and vain pretensions; by thy purity to reform our sensual appetites; by thy charity to warm our coldness towards God, and to supply our want of true fraternal love for our neighbor. Above all, grant that by thy holy protection, we may be restored to the grace of God if unhappily we have fallen away; that we may preserve it, if we are so happy as to enjoy his friendship, and may be aided to become more conformable to thy Son, by imitating thee, who art "the living image of His perfections."

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* Rom. vi, 18. † St. Jas. i, 24. ‡ Rom. vi. 18. § I Cor. xiii, 12.

Mirror of justice, pray for us!

MEDITATION XXX.

SEDES SAPIENTIÆ, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Seat of wisdom, pray for us!

SON of the Eternal Father, Word, adorable Word, "interior Word, thought, reason, increated intelligence, consubstantial with God," thou art "the source of wisdom."[*] Yes, thou art the eternal Wisdom, "begotten of the Most High before all creatures,"[†] the Wisdom "who sendeth knowledge as light, whose thoughts are deeper than the sea, and whose counsels are more profound than the abyss;"[‡] the Wisdom "which reacheth from end to end mightily, and disposeth all things sweetly."[§] Thou art the infinite Wisdom "which dwelt in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, as in a tabernacle,"[||] and whom Christian faith loves to contemplate under the figure of "the most beautiful of the children of men,"[¶] reposing on the knees of thy divine Mother. Thou, O Mary, art for the incarnate Wisdom a magnificent throne, more precious and more worthy than all we can imagine most beautiful, rich, and resplendent in creation. The Holy Scripture, speaking of the wonderful ivory throne of Solomon, says, that "there never was such a master-piece made in any kingdom."* We need not then fear to say that the Lord, in all the works of His omnipotence, has never created anything equal to her, whom He has made the living throne of His divine Son; a throne incomparable, where, according to the thought of St. Peter Damian, "our Lord has been pleased to fix the august dwelling of the Sovereign Monarch of the universe;" "sacred palace," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "which Wisdom has built for herself, a noble and magnificent sanctuary which she has decorated with magnificent pillars,† emblems of the seven gifts infused abundantly by the Holy Ghost into the soul of Mary." Where is the heart which has ever been so intimately penetrated with religious fear, or so careful to weigh the least action?

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[*] Eccles. i, 5. [†] Eccles. xxiv, 5. [‡] Eccles. xxiv, 37–39.
[§] Wisd. viii, 1. [||] Eccles. xxiv, 12. [¶] Ps. xliv, 3.

What heart has ever been so eminently endowed with the tender piety, which makes one attach himself to God with boundless devotedness, and an anxious desire to obey His commands?‡ What human creature has ever received such an infusion of the "science of the saints,"* that enlightens man with regard to his duties, and points out the path whereby he will reach his last end? The solitude of Mary in the temple during her infancy, her entire consecration of herself to the Lord, her words to the angel in the mystery of the Annunciation, "her hidden life in God"† at Nazareth, clearly prove how much her favored soul was adorned with those inestimable gifts. In whom has ever been seen the gift of fortitude so great as that which Mary displayed on Calvary, and which enabled her to bear the sharpest trials? In whom besides the "Virgin most prudent" has so brilliantly shone the gift of counsel, which directs us in the most delicate circumstances, or the gift of understanding, which searches the most mysterious ways of grace? "It was so lively in her," say the holy doctors, "that even her very sleep could not interrupt her sublime contemplation." Who else, in fine, has ever possessed the gift of wisdom is so high a degree? the gift which crowns all others, and consists in knowing well the author and end of all things, and in acting, living, and breathing solely for Him? "Did not Mary live for God alone? and was not her glorious death the last effect of divine love?"‡ Let us here offer all our homage at the royal throne of Eternal Wisdom, and supplicate her, who has been raised to such supereminent dignity, to obtain for us an abundant participation in those precious gifts which adorned her beautiful soul; the grace to esteem above all else the Christian wisdom taught us by her divine Son; to make it the sole rule of our conduct, by seeking above all "the kingdom of God and His justice,"* and by laying up for ourselves, through good works, "treasures which rust cannot consume, nor thieves break through nor steal."†

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* III Kings x, 20. † Prov. ix, 1. ‡ Ps. cxi, 1.

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* Prov. ix, 10. † Col. iii, 3. ‡ Bossuet.

O Mary! do not allow us to be deluded by "the false wisdom of the flesh, the enemy of God,"‡ nor the "wisdom of the world, which before the Lord is only folly;"§ rather grant that by thy powerful intercession, we may become docile disciples of the "wisdom which comes from above, which is chaste, a lover of peace, modest, filled with the fruit of virtue,"|| which keeps the spirit in the calm moderation of the gospel, represses the inordinate motions of the passions, inspires reserve and circumspection in judging, and teaches us to be indulgent towards others and watchful over ourselves.

O thou who wast "the living dwelling of

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* St. Matt. vi, 33. † St. Matt. vi, 20. ‡ Rom. i, 7.
§ I Cor. iii, 19. || St. Jas. iii, 17.

uncreated Wisdom,"* of the divine Jesus, in whom shines "the admirable variety of his gifts,"† beg for us a rich infusion of them.

Seat of wisdom, pray for us.

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* Wisd. vii, 28. † Ephes. iii, 10.

MEDITATION XXXI.

CAUSÆ NOSTRÆ LÆTITIÆ, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Cause of our joy, pray for us!

WHEN the world was plunged in the most profound darkness, and not one ray of Christian hope enlightened humanity beyond the grave; when the unhappy children of Adam labored under a three-fold degradation of heart, senses, and understanding, and true joy was unknown to the earth; then Mary came into the world; God willed her to coöperate in our salvation, she gave birth to the Redeemer and all was changed. Man, restored to grace, received sure and consoling enlightenment on the nobility of his nature, the grandeur of his destiny, and the means of obtaining it, efficient aid to cure his moral wounds, and abundant consolation for the miseries of life. From that time he might, even in this world, taste those pure and delicious joys which are a pledge and a foretaste of the eternal beatitude, which the Lord has promised him in the world to come. What was our condition before the coming of the "sweet Savior"* given to us by Mary? Where were the holy joys of charity, modesty, and humility, of devotedness inspired by faith; the pure delights of Catholic piety; the ineffable happiness of the adorable Eucharist?

Oh! it is to Mary, after God, that we owe all that, which, in the religion of Jesus Christ, gladdens and rejoices the heart. It is she who has secured for us so many priceless, inestimable gifts, so much pleasure even in this world, and all through her acquiescence with the word of the angel whom the Most High had commissioned to obtain her consent, before He would give Himself to us through her interposition. The illustrious Martyr, St. Irenaeus, nearly contemporary with the apostles, calls this consent of the Blessed Virgin "the cause of the salvation of mankind." "She has procured," says St. Augustin, "redemption for man, who, left to himself, was irremediably lost." "By Mary," adds St. Peter Damian, "in Mary, and with Mary, the Son of God has willed to regenerate human nature; without Him, nothing had been made; without her nothing had been repaired."†

It is then in this Virgin ever worthy of our gratitude and love, that the true children of the Church find their joy and felicity. She was, on earth, after the Ascension of the Savior, the stay and consolation of all the faithful; she is, in the kingdom of God, the joy of the elect, of which noble company she is the glory and the ornament; for "being assumed into heaven, she increased," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "the joy of its inhabitants," and "their greatest glory next to the sight of God," adds St. Bonaventure, "is to behold Mary." She is, also, according to the pious belief of the Church, the joy and consolation of the souls in purgatory. "Thou art their zealous liberatrix," says St. Andrew of Crete. "I am their Mother," said Mary herself to St. Bridget, "and I cease not to help them by my intercession." In fine, she is in this world the joy of all Christians; through all ages and every profession of life, the name of Mary is full of charm and sweetness, of succor and strength.

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* Tit. iii, 4. † St. John i, 3.

Let us praise God for having given us in Mary a cause of joy, so pure, so deep, so true, so enduring; let us praise Mary for having given us the principle and end of it.

Ah! if formerly the Jews testified their gratitude towards Judith and Esther by public rejoicings and acclamations,* what should not we do for the honor of Mary, the incomparable virgin, to whom we are infinitely more indebted? what should not be our devotion towards her august person, and our zeal in celebrating her festivals with an equal degree of filial joy and fervent piety? O thou good and tender Mary! whose salutation alone made the holy precursor leap with joy in the womb of His mother,* thou who knowest so well how to change the "sadness of the truly faithful into the most perfect joy,"† thou who art our hope after Jesus, whilst awaiting the happiness of beholding thee midst the angels and saints, we will unceasingly remember the charms of thy virtues, and will ever sing thy praises. Yes, with hearts burning with gratitude and tenderness, we love to cry, "May our right hand be forgotten if we should ever, O holy Virgin! be unmindful of the sacred rights thou hast over our hearts. May our tongues wither if in their pious canticles they do not place thee next to thy divine Son."‡

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* Jud. xvi.—Esther xvi.

May we, filled with the perpetual remembrance of thy benefits, daily repeat with new ardor,

Cause of our joy, pray for us!

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* Luke i, 44. † St. John xvi, 20. ‡ Ps. cxxxvi, 5, 6.

MEDITATION XXXII.

VAS SPIRITUALE, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Spiritual vessel, pray for us!

AS much as spirit is superior to matter, so much is the body ennobled as it rises through the purity and righteousness of its actions towards the dignity and sublimity of the soul. In like manner, the order of grace excels all that is most eminent in nature, so that the body of a Christian who endeavors by supernatural motives to sanctify the use of all its faculties, receives an admirable and noble character. To honor in Mary this grandeur and this nobility, the Church invokes her under the title of "precious vessel,"* an emblem often quoted in the Holy Scriptures; and to make us understand the sublime degree of her dignity, she calls her "spiritual vessel."

Does not the Church thus make known to us that the Virgin of virgins enjoyed by anticipation, so to speak, a kind of transformation, like that which will take place in the elect on the great day of the general judgment? and that as her sacred body possessed beforehand some of the attributes of the mind,* her soul in its relations with God, felt not the weight or hindrance of matter, but could freely rise towards its Creator and dwell in His adorable presence, as if it were not subject to the operations of the senses? Mary was preserved from original sin, and from concupiscence, its fatal consequence. "She enjoyed then," says Louis of Blois, "the privilege of our first parents in the terrestrial paradise, who, so long as their innocence was unstained, kept all their senses, and all the faculties of their souls, united to God and perfectly subject to the spirit." But was it not also proper that the flesh, which, according to the saying of St. Augustin, "was to become the divine flesh of Jesus," should be made worthy of that honor by qualities suitable to the beauty of the soul which animated it? This soul belonged entirely to God; it was transformed into God. How then could we suppose that her body, created by the Lord for a participation in the mystery of the Incarnation, would in any way prevent the ascent of that blessed soul or fail to be in harmony with its sublime destiny? Let us then receive with pious eagerness, that which Richard of St. Victor has transmitted to us from so many other holy doctors, that her exterior as well as her interior was entirely angelic, and admirably reflected the marvellous communications of her soul with God. If the eyes of John the Baptist, destined to behold Him whom other prophets had foretold, disdained to look upon creatures, surely we cannot doubt that Mary consecrated to her divine Son the use of all her senses; that, in her was seen a life all heavenly and totally unlike that of other mortals. Alas! how unequal we are to such a model; we, who attach ourselves to vain idols, changing and vanishing with time; we, who covet the perishable things of this world, and use all our efforts in the pursuit of delusive pleasures; we, who seem to have but a feeble faith in the invisible goods of eternity;* we, who but too often are overcome by this body, whose weight renders difficult our communing with God by prayer, and hinders us from walking joyously in the service of our divine Master!

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* Prov. xx, 15.

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* I Cor. xv, 44.

Oh! let us, henceforth, earnestly endeavor to become spiritual men,† remembering that "he who sows in the spirit, shall reap in eternity."‡ If it be impossible for us to resemble Mary who was so divinely privileged, let us at least by our fervent devotion* endeavor to correct the fatal influence of the flesh, which holds the mind captive and hinders the sublime flight it desires to take towards its Author.† O Mary, God made thee, from the beginning, "a vessel of true purity,"‡ but when the Holy Ghost "descended upon thee,"§ to operate in thy chaste womb the great mystery of the mercy of a God, who showed Himself in the flesh,"|| and, meanwhile, to exalt thee among all creatures to the greatest dignity, He rendered thee more and more pure and holy; He filled thee more and more with the supernatural spirit¶ which makes men live only for God and the goods of eternity. We honor in thee the superhuman life which is so perfect, and all the gifts with which it pleased the Most High to adorn thee. May we, as far as our weakness will allow, imitate thy virtues, by disengaging ourselves from the captivity of the senses, by advancing towards eternity as children of light; applying ourselves to works of justice, and of truth, and to all that is pleasing to the Lord."** Oh! refuse not to obtain for us this grace.

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* II Cor. iv, 18. † I Cor. iii, 1. ‡ Gal. vi, 8.

Spiritual vessel, pray for us!

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* Rom. xiii, 2. † Wisd. ix. 15. ‡ Prov. xxv, 4. § St. Luke i, 35. || Tim. iii, 16. ¶ Ps. l, 14. ** Eph. v, 8, 9, 10.

MEDITATION XXXIII.

VAS HONORABILE, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Vessel of honor, pray for us!

IT IS a great honor for the body to be united to a soul which is "the image and likeness of God;"* and the more beautiful that soul, and the more it is enriched with the gifts of the Lord, the higher is the dignity to which that intimate alliance elevates the body; it becomes, to the eye of faith, like a vessel which is the more precious, as it contains a most rare and exquisite perfume. How great then the honor for the body of Mary to be united to a soul, which, after that of Jesus, is the most noble, most pure, most holy, and the most richly endowed with all the favors of Heaven! But how much greater is the dignity of her body in its relation to the divine maternity! It was, no doubt, a great honor for Abraham to receive our Lord under the form of an angel, and to entertain Him familiarly,[*] yet God did not unite Himself substantially with this holy patriarch. It was a wonderful favor for Moses to enter the formidable cloud which hung over Mount Sinai, and amidst thunder and lightning to converse face to face with the Most High,[†] yet God did not unite Himself substantially with that immortal legislator. Elias was highly favored in being allowed to hear and behold striking evidences of the infinite grandeur of the Supreme Being,[‡] but God, in manifesting His adorable presence, did not unite Himself in substance to that faithful prophet. It was a great favor granted to Zacheus to receive Jesus Christ at his table,[§] for Lazarus and his sisters to show Him hospitality and to enjoy even the signal favor of His divine friendship,[||] but how far removed were all these precious communications from His intimate relationship and incomparable union with His sacred Mother!

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* Gen. i, 27.

Ah! let us not be astonished that the holy doctors, struck with admiration, should have, in the most expressive terms, saluted the august womb wherein the Divine Word assumed human nature. The flesh of Mary, says St. Augustin, is the same flesh with that of Jesus.

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[*] Gen. xviii. [†] Exod. xix, 20. [‡] III Kings xix. [§] St. Luke xix. [||] St. Luke x; St. John xi.

"It is a living heaven," exclaims St. Peter Damian, "it is the corporeal sanctuary of the plentitude of the Divinity." "The Lord," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "in choosing for Himself a mother from among the daughters of Adam, has exalted her to so great a dignity, that the eyes of men and angels cannot contemplate it." We justly honor the sacred vessels wherein the Church encloses the blessed and adorable Eucharist; but what proportion is there between those vessels of gold and silver, ornamented with precious stones, and the august and venerable body which gave to our divine Saviour the sacred blood which He shed for our redemption? Yes, this is by excellence "the vessel chosen by the Lord,"* and of a value infinitely superior to that of a "vessel of gold, enriched with all kinds of precious stones."† This is that vessel so pure and so holy, which, having so worthily "borne God in itself,"‡ did not know the corruption of the grave, but, on the contrary, according to the pious tradition of the Church, was glorified by a resurrection similar to that of her divine Son. Let us here reanimate our faith, remembering that, by the ineffable mystery of the Blessed Eucharist, our body, corruptible as it is, is raised to an intimate union which makes it also an

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* Acts ix, 15. † Eccles. l, 10. ‡ I Cor. vi, 20.

"honorable vessel," so that we should constantly fear to profane it, even by the slightest fault. Oh! we cannot sufficiently meditate upon nor dive into this truth, which is quite unfathomable. By Holy Communion we become temples of Jesus; nay more, sanctuaries of Jesus, tabernacles of Jesus; still more, real vessels, sacred vessels in which our God reposes. What do I say? All this is not enough; we become living vessels, with which He is so closely united as to be one with us, says St. Cyril. Having received such a great honor, let us not be so unfortunate as to forget it or reduce ourselves to a level with the brute creation devoid of understanding.* Let us who so deeply reverence the sacred vessels of our altars, respect ourselves also in all places and at all times. Let us keep our thoughts, desires, affections, views, and actions impressed with the nobility, grandeur, and glory to which we are elevated by one Holy Communion.

O Mary! thou who after God art most worthy of our homage; thou who didst bear in thy chaste womb for nine months Him whom the angels adore, "veiling themselves with their wings,"† what can we offer to thee worthy of the honor which He has bestowed on thee, in forming from thy substance the body with which He clothed Himself, and, by so doing, has given thee a kind of inexpressible identity with Himself? Accept the expression of the sentiments with which so great an elevation and grandeur must fill all truly faithful hearts. Make us feel that the Holy Eucharist elevates us far above all other creatures, and renders us far more sacred than the vessels in which it reposes, and that we should act in all things and forever as "vessels of honor,"* prepared for eternal glory.

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* Ps. xlviii, 13. † Is. vi. 2.

Vessel of honor, pray for us!

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* Rom. ix 21–23.

MEDITATION XXXIV.

VAS INSIGNE DEVOTIONIS, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Vessel of singular devotion, pray for us!

PIETY, devotion, and fervor are words utterly unable to express the burning zeal which Mary had for the service of God. Who can describe the ardor of her prayer, her intimate union with God, her ecstatic contemplation, her peace and spiritual joy, her continual aspirations towards her beloved, the sanctity of her thoughts, the purity of her affections and desires, the generosity of her devotedness which was so absolute, so magnanimous in the service of her Creator?

Temple of Jerusalem, wherein she spent the first years of her life so piously, what admirable secrets did you enclose within your sacred precincts! August house of Nazareth in which she lived so long, enjoying the presence and continued contemplation of her God who had become her Son! walls that speak so eloquently to the heart of the pilgrim at Loretto, tell us some of those marvels of adoration, of praise, of love, of the superhuman outpouring of the soul of Mary into the heart of her divine Jesus. O holy dwelling in which she lived with the beloved Apostle after the death of the Savior![*] what incomparable transports of devotion have you concealed from the knowledge of man, what ineffable sighs sent forth after the Ascension of Jesus, what impetuosity of love, in which concurred all the tenderness of nature, all the efficacy of divine grace!

If Queen Esther dared say to God: "Thou knowest that thy servant hath never placed her joy and happiness but in thee;"[†] if King David testified of himself that "the praise of the Lord was ever in his mouth;"[‡] if in the fervor of his soul he exclaimed, "When shall I come and appear before the face of God?"[§] if the Apostle St. Paul could say, "It is not I who live but Jesus who liveth in me,"[||] "I burn with a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ;" if, in fine, the illustrious missionary of the Indies, in the midst of the transports of his piety, being overpowered with love, prayed to God to moderate his favors, crying out, "It is enough, O Lord! it is enough;" what must we think of the august Mother of the Savior, of her whom the saints have called a furnace of divine love, whom the spouse of the Canticle compares to "a lamp of fire and flames?"* Was there ever a day, an hour, an instant when her thoughts, her words, her will, all the desires of her being were not centered in God alone, or in which she did not seek to do what was most agreeable to her heavenly Father,† and with such eagerness, such purity of intention, such devotedness, as is beyond our power to conceive? But let us rather question the angels and seraphs who were enraptured, seeing the ardor of her devotion. And who can tell the joy, the sweetness, and delight with which that devotion inundated her soul? Thou didst give us some conception of it, O Mary! when thou didst exclaim in thy admirable Canticle, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior!"‡ O Piety! O sweet and tender Christian piety, the principle and support of all the magnificent works of charity, that givest resignation to the heart crushed by pain and anguish, and strength to the soul which is assailed by despair, that draws from the eyes of the repentant sinner tears mixed with consolation, and from innocence inebriated with divine love, tears almost celestial. Come, oh come! penetrate us with precious unction, come and make us vessels of honor and sanctity, fit to be devoted to the service of the divine Master, and prepared for all kinds of good works.* May all our members, by thy holy influence, be in the hands of God as arms of justice to combat and vanquish sin;† may our bodies be living victims, holy and agreeable in His eyes. O Mary! admirable vessel in which the Most High has displayed the richness of His love, deign to obtain for us the grace to be pious, and show ourselves mild and strong in our piety.

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[*] St. John xix, 27. [†] Esth. xiv, 18. [‡] Ps. xxxiii, 2. [§] Ps. xli, 3. [||] Gal. ii, 20.

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* Cant. viii, 6. † St. John viii, 29. ‡ St. Luke i, 47.

Formerly a poor widow relying on the word of the prophet Eliseus, desired her children to bring her a great number of empty vessels; she poured into each of them a small portion of the oil remaining; all the vessels were miraculously filled, and she had wherewith not only to pay her harassing creditor, but also to support herself and family. And to thee, O holy Virgin, relying on the word of the angel who hailed thee "full of grace,"‡ on the word of the Church who calls thee "vessel of election," we offer our hearts, though they are devoid of Christian piety, and of good works which flow from it; refuse not to pour on them incessantly some of thy superabundance, that we may be able, not only to satisfy the divine justice by our fervor, but also to acquire new merit for heaven. It is written that "piety has a promise of life, both for the present and the future;"* and that this consoling promise may be realized in our favor,

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* II Tim. ii, 21. † Rom. vi, 13. ‡ Luke i, 28.

Vessel of singular devotion, pray for us!

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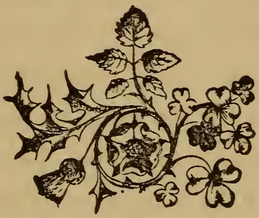
* I Tim. iv, 8.



MEDITATION XXXV.

ROSA MYSTICA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Mystical Rose, pray for us!

THE Holy Scriptures cause us to hear the voice of the Spouse in the Canticles comparing her beloved to a fragrant flower-garden, whence are exhaled the most exquisite odors.[*] "Arise, O north wind, and come, O south wind, blow through my garden and let the aromatic spices thereof flow."[†] Christian piety loves to recognize the holy Virgin under the figure of all the plants and fragrant flowers of the garden of the Spouse in the Canticles; it loves, with St. Sophronius, to call Mary "the true garden of delight, where heavenly flowers abound, with the odor of all virtues." From among these flowers, the Church chooses the rose as a fit type of the Beloved of the Lord, thus offering to her the most sweet and gracious praises, and those best calculated to charm our hearts.

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[*] Cant. iv, 14. [†] Cant. iv, 16.

O Rose, whom the Creator has made so sweet and so beautiful, so rich in color, so agreeable in odor! O queen of all terrestrial flowers, so beautiful in thy inimitable hues, so variegated in thy shades of color, so sweet in thy fragrance, with what happiness do we hail thee as the emblem of Mary, our holy Mother, of that queen of all intelligences, even the most highly favored with grace, of that queen of all spiritual flowers, which are forever the ornaments of the Church in heaven and on earth, of that queen, in fine, of all creatures. Mary is like thee, but in a sense infinitely surpassing thy delicious charms; she is resplendent with beauty, and charms us by the sweet and sacred perfume of her virtues. Never was the beauteous soul of the Blessed Virgin subjected to the shadow of the slightest change; never did the breath of evil tarnish the bloom or freshness of that Mystical Rose; never did the petals of that marvellous flower, so dearly cherished by God, cease to exhale the sweet incense of love and praise, love, most ardent, praise, most fervent. Though like her sister-blossoms planted in a soil where storms bend and crush their stems and strip their brilliant flowers, she never lost any of her original beauty, never wasted the sweetness or excellence of her perfume.

Nevertheless, O Mystical Rose, thou didst have thorns, and, alas! of the sharpest kind, but they were for thee alone. Couldst thou, O Mary, fail to resemble the divine Chief of the elect, the adorable Savior, who entered into His glory by sufferings and death?* Was it not also necessary that thou, like thy divine Son, shouldst by experience know how "to compassionate our infirmities?"† how to feel for us that tender sympathy which would, in a manner, make thee experience our sorrow and anguish?‡

But for us who are thy brethren in the flesh and thy children by grace, thou art without thorns. "Thou hast nothing that can wound," says St. Ambrose, "nothing which is not the expression of universal benevolence." What is there in thee, says St. Bernard, "which can inspire fear or diffidence? Thou hast nothing terrifying, nothing austere; thou art sweetness towards all." "Read attentively the history given in the Gospel," adds this holy Doctor, "search carefully its sacred pages; if therein you find in Mary the least reproach, the shadow of severity, or the slightest evidence of anything contrary to immutable sweetness, I will be satisfied never more to speak of that Blessed Mother."

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* St. Luke xxiv, 26. † Heb. iv, 15. ‡ Heb. ii, 17–18.

Ah! let us be drawn by the sweet odor of the immortal Rose which embalms all innocent hearts, and is their joy and delight; "let us run after her."[*] Let us beware of inebriating ourselves with the ephemeral perfumes of this earth, with the foolishness of worldly flattery, or of being dazzled by the deceitful pomp of creatures, who, "like the grass of the field, bloom in the morning and fall and fade in the evening."[†] Let us remember that all things in this world have been given to raise our souls to God, and that far from attaching ourselves to them as if they were our last end, we should use them to excite ourselves to seek ardently after our true country, where bloom immortal flowers, and where the Mystical Rose is the admiration of the saints and angels.

O Mary, thou hast been exalted "like the rose-bush in Jericho,"[‡] thou didst bud forth "as the rose plant by the brooks of waters,"[§] thy candor is "pure as that of the lily,"[||] and "as the queen of roses in the days of spring."[¶] But who shall give us a just and true idea of "the good odor of Jesus"[**] which thou didst breathe? who shall tell how the fragrance of thy virtue surpassed that of

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[*] Cant. i, 3. [†] Ps. lxxxix, 6. [‡] Eccles. xxiv, 18. [§] Eccles. xxxix, 17. [§] Is. xxxv, 1. [¶] Eccles. 1, 8 [**] II Cor. ii, 15.

"exquisite myrrh"* and most sweet incense? Yes, thou art the chosen flower, which alone in the barren plain of this world hast drawn to thee the divine dew of the Just One.

Blessed flower, marvellous flower, celestial flower, in heaven alone it shall be given us to know and praise thee worthily! Teach us to walk in "the odor of thy perfumes,"† "in the way, pure and immaculate,"‡ in the way of the true children of God, that we may one day attain the happiness of seeing and glorifying thy Son for all the favors He has bestowed upon thee.

Mystical Rose, pray for us!

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* Eccles. xxiv, 20–21. † Cant. i, 3. ‡ Ps. c, 2.

MEDITATION XXXVI.

TURRIS DAVIDICA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Tower of David, pray for us!

IF "the tower of David crowned with pinnacles, with a thousand bucklers on its walls, and all the arms of the forces of Israel,"* was the ornament and the bulwark of Jerusalem, is not Mary the glory and the invincible fortress of the Church? Does not the blood of David flow in her veins, the blood of that holy king, who, before ascending the throne, had united with the modest qualities of a shepherd, the noble distinction of victory over the Philistine giant? How justly then is Mary called the "Tower of David," she in whom we admire such profound humility in union with so much greatness and glory? But why may we specially apply to the Blessed Virgin the image of "a great and high tower"† that defends the walls of a city? It is principally on account of the protection she affords against the assaults of Satan against the Church, which is the depository of the sacred truths brought from heaven by our Savior, Jesus Christ. "Oh! how powerful against hell is that august Queen," cries out St. Bonaventure. "She is more terrible to him than an army arrayed for battle."* For this reason the fallen angel, in violently attacking the Church, has never failed to assault also the most holy Virgin, who is its impregnable fortress. From the second century, when the impious Cerinthus dared contest one of the privileges which Catholic faith secured to Mary, there has been scarcely one heresiarch who did not, either by his tongue or pen, directly or indirectly, cast against her the venom of his pernicious doctrine; and there has not been one who has not been confounded by the fulminations and authority of the Church, always ready to defend Jesus Christ, when attacked in the person of His august Mother. On this account, the faithful guardian of heavenly doctrine, is pleased to represent to us "the old serpent,"† attempting in vain to raise his head from beneath the victorious foot of the Virgin; and it has pleased the Lord to show, in modern times, more remarkably than ever, her admirable power over error.

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* Cant. iv, 4. † II Esdr. iii, 27.

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* Cant. vi, 3. † Apoc. xii, 9

It is remarkable that in the sixteenth century the nations most devoted to Mary were either preserved intact, or had less to suffer from the ravages of heresy. Look at Italy, Spain, Belgium, and France. France, where her protection was again strikingly manifested towards the end of the eighteenth century, when impiety armed with political power reigned with absolute sovereignty; when there were no more churches, no more altars, no more priests; and when faith was even a crime judged worthy of death. O Mary! wilt thou ever forget that France has ever been for thee a country of predilection, and that it was consecrated to thee by one of her kings of pious memory?† Didst thou not hear the ardent sighs of thy faithful children, who were so numerous in the midst of desolating apostacy? And did not our confessors of the faith unite their supplications with those of their faithful flocks, from whom the fury of the tempest had compelled them to fly? Oh! this good and tender mother will not abandon her cherished people; all the efforts of impiety shall fail before this new "Tower of David." We find that churches were soon reopened, altars raised, pastors restored to their flocks, and on the feast of her glorious Assumption, the Sovereign Pontiff signed that celebrated concordat which was the pledge of the restoration of the Church in France.

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† Louis XIII.

O divine Mother of Him who called Himself "the Truth,"[*] to thee thy adorable Son seems to have confided the care of the Church; to thee the same Church gives the glory of her triumphs over all the errors that have threatened to shake the very foundation of the "City of God."[†] "Thou art her refuge, a strong tower against her enemies;[‡] thou art the invincible tower[§] which protects her children in the day of tribulation."[‖] Ah! save us, O holy Virgin, from the assaults of hell, and particularly from the danger of losing our faith; defend us above all at the hour of death, and that we may be strengthened for the final combat, obtain for us from God a lively and unshaken faith.

Tower of David, pray for us!

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[*] John xiv, 6.
[†] Ps. lxxxvi, 3.
[‡] Ps. lx, 4.
[§] Prov. xviii, 10.
[‖] Ps. xix, 2.

MEDITATION XXXVII.

TURRIS EBURNEA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Tower of ivory, pray for us!

IVORY has a brilliant whiteness and beautiful enamel which please the eye, yet it has solidity and strength like to the gigantic animal from which it is taken, and this two-fold quality is applicable to the Blessed Virgin. In what other creature besides Mary shall we find the candor and innocence of soul admired even by the angels, the brightness of virginity, which, even during the days of her pilgrimage upon earth, shone on her person, and whose charms moved the heart with an indescribable respect. Not to speak again of the ineffable purity which has already been the subject of our meditations, let us consider the mystic "tower of ivory"* as the model and support of our perseverance in the service of God.

How constant was the devotedness of Mary in the service of the Lord, in the midst of all the sacrifices which filled her holy life in this world! From the time of her separation from her family, which the Most High required in her tender age, what tribulation, what grief, what prophetic visions both heart-rending and certain, what agonizing thoughts elevated her constancy in the sublime performance of her duty! The perplexity of St. Joseph regarding a mystery that prudence would not permit her to reveal to her chaste spouse; her journey to Bethlehem, so painful in every regard; the isolation and destitution of a stable, the only asylum afforded the infant Jesus; the double prophecy of Simeon, fortelling the unjust hatred of which our Savior would be the object, and the sword which was to "pierce His mother's heart;"* the flight into Egypt, with all the pains and privations incident to exile; the affecting absence of Jesus during three days after the Paschal feast; the humiliating labors to which she saw Him subjected in the work-shop of Nazareth; all the fatigues and trials of His public life; the intrigues and pursuit of His enemies, their atrocious calumnies which so deeply affected her; in fine, the ignominies and untold sufferings of His passion; the cross ever present to her maternal eyes, and she standing at the foot of that cross, ah! what a series of uninterrupted severe trials, sufficient to discourage a daughter of Eve! Yet, in the midst of all these trials, Mary was ever calm and serene, ever resigned, ever inseparably united to the will of her God, always strong and devoted, ever and always the same; what an example! what an eloquent lesson to us who are so weak and inconstant in doing good! So long as dangerous occasions are far from us, and temptations leave us unmolested, or the world leaves us undisturbed in the fulfilment of our duties towards God, "our feet stray not from the right path;"* they even run without fatigue in "the way of salvation;"† but soon as obstacles present themselves, soon as we are called upon to do violence to our feelings, in order to break the seductive charms of the heart and senses, or to raise ourselves above the senseless mockeries of "the children of the world,"‡ we become faint. Ah! if we would imitate Mary, far from being discouraged by the tempests which Divine Providence wills us to sustain, we would look on them as precious means of expiation, of acquiring a holy diffidence in ourselves, and an entire confidence in God alone, of fortifying ourselves against evil by the practice of good works, and treasuring inestimable merits for life eternal. And you, also, O pious souls! were you to walk in the footsteps of her whom you delight to call your good mother, would you not bear with more courage and confidence the weight of those interior trials which may befall you? Ah! forget not that one day of fidelity to God in the midst of aridity, darkness of mind, and distaste of His service, is more beneficial to you than thousands spent amid the holy joys of devotion. "There are," says St. Augustine, "two lives depending on each other; that of trial, which we must endure; that of beatitude, for which we hope." In this second life every sigh, every act of resignation shall be taken into account before God; you will find them at the feet of the just Judge* transformed into precious pearls, to adorn your heavenly diadem.

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* Cant. vii, 4.

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* Luke ii, 35.

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* Ps. xv, 12. † Ps. xl, 31. ‡ St. Luke xvi, 8.

O Mary! incomparably more glorious in the eyes of the Lord by thy virtues and thy merits, than were in the eyes of men, "the palace of ivory," built by the seventh king of Israel,† and the ivory throne of Solomon,‡ we will always esteem thee the tower of salvation "whence help must come"§ against the world and the devil, against the evil propensities of nature, against obscurity of intellect and discouragement of will; whence we may obtain perseverance in good amidst all the temptations of our life;* the priceless grace for which we cannot ask with too much earnestness. By thy happy intervention we hope to obtain it; in thy immaculate heart we will take refuge as in an inviolable asylum.

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* II Tim. iv, 8. † III Kings xxii, 39. ‡ III Kings x, 18. § Ps. cxx, 1.

O thou! whom we here invoke with assured confidence,

Tower of ivory, pray for us!

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* Job vii, 1.

MEDITATION XXXVIII.

DOMUS AUREA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

House of gold, pray for us!

HOW beautiful the temple of Jerusalem, built by King Solomon! Not to speak of the magnificent stones with which the foundations and walls were built, who could but have admired the wainscot of exquisitely carved cedar, the cherubim, the palms in relief, the flowers sparkling in the brilliancy of gold, the pavement also inlaid with the same precious metal, which was scattered so profusely over the temple that, "there was no spot which was not covered with it,"* so that it might, almost literally, be styled, "a house of gold?" With much greater reason is this name applied to the Blessed Virgin, the living sanctuary which God formed for himself, the august and "sacred dwelling which He has chosen."† But all this expresses little, for with her He has united

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* III Kings vi, 22. † Ps. cxxxi, 13.

Himself in sanctifying grace more intimately than with any other creature; and through the divine maternity, which resembles the union that makes the Eternal Word and the Son of Mary but one and the same person. Previously to the mystery of the Incarnation, thou wast, O incomparable Virgin, the "house of the Lord,"* pre-eminently His "house of gold;" thou whom He had adorned with prerogatives and privileges infinitely more precious than all the gold of the world; thou, whose every thought, desire, word, and action, was, in His eyes, of a value incomparably greater, than is to man that precious metal, the object of his search, which is so seductive, and which is often, alas! too often, the idol of his whole life!

But, on the eternally memorable day of the Annunciation, thou didst become, in a still more admirable sense, His house of gold; for, of thy pure substance, the Word made then and forever His own. He dwelt in thee for the first nine months of His expiatory life upon earth, living in thy life; and that sublime life, that ineffable union has entitled thee to be proclaimed "blessed" by all generations, blessed by all the prophets, by all the powers of heaven; yes, blessed in our spirit, in our heart; blessed in the concert of our praises! Justly then is Mary called "House of gold," that Virgin endowed with perfect purity, of which gold is the symbol, being subject to no alteration; that Virgin burning with divine love, of which gold, by its color, is again the emblem!

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* III Kings vi, 22.

Is not her perfect integrity one of the greatest miracles of the Lord? "The excellency of her purity," says St. Anselm, "incomparably surpasses that of all other creatures." And was it not this quality which made her worthy of being the reparatrix of the world plunged into the abyss of perdition? Her love for God was none the less amazing. "How can we doubt," exclaims St. Augustine, "that Mary in whose womb God himself dwelt for nine months, should have been transformed into charity?" Therefore, St. Bernardine said well of the Blessed Virgin that "there was in her such love, that if it had been in her power, she would have delivered herself for her Son, not once, or a thousand, but an infinite number of times."

Alas! why is it not so with us, at least so far as our weak nature will allow? Why is it that we, who by Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist, have been consecrated as temples of God,* show ourselves so unworthy of "the Holy of Holies,"† who has deigned to make us His living dwellings?"[*] How is it that we who would be so eager to decorate our dwellings, if they were to be honored with an illustrious guest, have so little zeal in making of our soul and body, "a house of gold?" Why, again, is it, that instead of being inflamed with love for the Sovereign Good, we give ourselves up to trifles and deceits,[†] and are lukewarm and cold towards God, so amiable and loving? Shame and confusion unto us, but also repentance, and, henceforward, reiterated acts of piety, devotion, and ardent love for Him, who, by a signal favor, has been pleased to make us His temples. By thee, O Mary! by thy powerful intercession it is, that the words of thy divine Son shall be accomplished: "If any one love me, he will keep my word; my Father will love him, and we will come and dwell with him."[‡] In thee, the Lord has been pleased to dwell in "an admirable manner,[§] and He has filled thee with His glory"[||] more marvellously than He did the temple of Solomon. Oh! could we but understand to what honor He has raised us by making us His living temples, how faithfully would we keep ourselves pure and holy, and immolate unceasingly on the altar of our hearts, nature to duty, present and fleeting joys to the future and permanent joys of heaven, zealously enkindling there the fire of holy love! Pray for us, O Mary, that we may have this inestimable happiness; with all our hearts we conjure thee to grant this favor.

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* II Cor. vi, 16. † Dan. iii, 24.

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[*] I Peter ii, 5. [†] Wisd. iv, 12. [‡] John xiv, 23. [§] Ps. cxxxi, 14. [||] III Kings viii, 10.

House of gold, pray for us!

MEDITATION XXXIX.

FÆDERIS ARCA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Ark of the Covenant, pray for us!

IF THE magnificent temple of Solomon, where everything was rich and precious, presents to us an emblem of Mary, that, which was the most august in that "house of the Lord,"* the Ark of the Covenant, is a far more significant figure of the Blessed Virgin. The Ark was made of wood "which was incorruptible,"† although its germ was corruptible; thus, thou, O Mary, though sprung from a guilty stock, wast preserved from original stain, and corruption could never come near thee. The Ark was covered with pure gold within and without; it was surmounted with a crown of gold, enclosed by the propitiatory, which was also made of that precious metal; two cherubim, with outstretched wings, formed also of gold, overshadowed the Mercy seat, and from its summit the majesty of God delivered His oracles to the children of Israel.* And thou, O Mary, "full of grace,"† with what unalloyed gold hast thou been vested, what a throne didst thou afford to the Lord! Can we not say with St. Andrew of Crete, that "thou art the propitiatory of the universal world, the living sanctuary whence the Incarnate Word‡ published to the entire earth the oracle of salvation?" Within the Ark were deposited a golden vessel filled with manna, Aaron's rod which had miraculously blossomed, and the two tables of the law which were given to Moses on Mount Sinai.§ Thou, O Virgin, hast had the honor of conceiving and bringing forth Him, who for us, made Himself the true manna, "the living bread which descended from heaven;"|| and the inconceivable privilege of becoming the mother of a Son who was formed and was born of thee, by a more astonishing prodigy than that which struck the twelve tribes with wonder, when they saw the rod of their high-priest covered with leaves, flowers, and fruit.¶ Thou didst enclose within thyself, by a favor granted to no other, the very Author of the tables of the law; thou didst become as the depository of the sacred titles of the Old and New Testament, the abridgment of all the divine oracles, the book of the divine Word, whose pages the Eternal Father opens to the whole world. God formerly imprinted in the hearts of His chosen people, and in those of the Gentiles, a profound respect for the Ark of the Covenant, by means of various prodigies.* Before it, the Israelites prostrated themselves that they might render heaven propitious,† and its sojourn in the house of Obededom drew upon himself and family the benedictions of the Lord.‡ Before thee, O Mary, the faithful prostrate themselves to obtain from thy divine Son the favors which they solicit, knowing well that He delights in granting His gifts to men through thee, and that "from thy hands all graces flow." Through thee are wrought innumerable prodigies, both in the temporal and spiritual order, and thy holy image, when piously venerated in Christian families, brings down precious benedictions. In the solemn entrance of the Ark into Jerusalem, who cannot see prefigured thy glorious Assumption, O thou Ark of sanctity! who didst rise from earth to heaven to enter into the rest of the Lord,§ and to seat thyself at the right hand of Jesus,‖ where thou dost unceasingly show thyself to be a good mother to us?

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* III Kings viii, 11. † Exod. xxv, 10.

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* Exod. xxv. † St. Luke i, 28. ‡ St. John i, 14. § Heb. ix, 4. || St. John vi, 51. ¶ Num. xvii.

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* Exod. xxv; Jos. iii—vi; I Kings v—vi. † Joas. vii, 6.
‡ II Kings vi, 11. § Ps. cxxxi, 8. ‖ St. Mark xvi, 19.

Ah! may we show ourselves true children of Mary, and, in this ark of the new alliance, find a continual safe-guard and source of celestial benedictions. "He who neglects the service due to the Blessed Virgin," says St. Bonaventure, "runs the risk of dying in his sins; but he who worthily honors her shall be justified and saved,"* for she is, according to St. Peter Chrysologus, "the happy mediatrix between man and the God-man." "And if the merit of him who prays," adds St. Anselm, "cannot obtain the graces which he asks, the merits of the holy Mother who intercedes for him, will obtain his petition."

As the Ark, preceding the Hebrews in their passage through the river Jordan, led the way into the promised land, so thou also, O Mary, dost enable us to pass in safety through the perilous waves of this life. Thou art for us the living Ark of the Covenant of the Sovereign Lord of the universe.† Ah! no doubt the alliance which "the God of majesty,"‡ deigned to form with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the children of Israel, was very precious, but it was only a shadow, a type of that which the Eternal Son of God has given us in becoming man in thy womb, and redeeming us by His adorable blood which He applies to us; which even from our cradle, sanctifies, helps, and fortifies us, consoles us during life, and to our last hour, encourages and disposes us to pass with confidence through the formidable portal of eternity. O thou, by whom these blessings have come to us, paradise of the new Adam, living palace of the Most High, obtain for us the grace to use them worthily, and to say always with the transports of a faithful heart,

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* In Psalt. † Jos. iii, 11. ‡ Ps. xxviii, 3.

Ark of the Covenant, pray for us!

MEDITATION XL.

JANUA CŒLI, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Gate of heaven, pray for us!

"I AM the gate,"* says Jesus, "no one comes to the Father but by me."† By giving Mary the name of "Gate of Heaven," do we not attribute to her what belongs to the Man-God alone? do we not violate the inalienable rights of the Son in favor of the Mother?

Ah! the Church which is "the pillar and the ground of truth,"‡ forgets not the oracle of St. Paul, "As there is but one God, there is but one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, who has redeemed all men;"§ but with St. Jerome she teaches that "all honor paid to Mary is referred to Jesus as to its end," and with St. Anselm that "if Mary has such power, she holds it from Jesus, and it is in union with Him that she exercises it."

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* St. John x, 9. † St. John xiv, 6. ‡ Tim. iii, 15. § Tim. ii, 5, 6.

It is, then, for the greater glory of the God-Man, that the Church invokes the Blessed Virgin as "Gate of Heaven," a title admirably suited to her. Was it not by Mary that heaven was brought upon earth, when she gave to men Him who was called "God with us"?* for, says St. Leo, "she had conceived Him in her heart before she conceived Him in her womb." Was it not by Mary that, under the appearance of humanity, there was shown to man "the goodness of God our Redeemer,"† who is "the resurrection and the life,"‡ and whose glorious ascension alone could introduce into eternal happiness the souls of the most glorious saints who had died before He "entered into His glory"?§ "Was it not by Mary," says St. Augustin, "that God descended visibly upon earth, in order that by her, men might merit heaven?" O sweet Virgin Mary! what powerful succor dost thou afford to all those who implore thy help, or who humbly supplicate thee to aid them in rendering themselves worthy to enter one day into the heavenly kingdom! Oh! well did St. Anselm say, that "by thee exiles are called to their eternal country." Thou dost enlighten, encourage and sustain them, for "thou art," says St. Augustin, "the mother of all the faithful who are the members of Jesus Christ, since by thy charity thou didst coöperate in their spiritual birth;" and if they do not render useless the powerful influence of thy benign protection, thou wilt conduct them happily to the harbor of salvation. This caused St. Antoninus to use the following remarkable words: "If it be impossible that he from whom thou turnest away thy mercy should be saved, it is also certain that he for whom thou intercedest shall obtain justification and eternal glory." If then, to this present time, we have seriously endeavored to merit that the Blessed Virgin should turn on us her eyes of mercy, let us be happy and bless the Lord, who, St. John Damascene says, "inspires with a tender devotion to Mary, those whom he has predestined to eternal salvation."

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* St. Matt. i, 23. † Tit. iii, 4. ‡ St. John xi, 25. § St. Luke xxiv, 26.

Let us raise our joyful eyes towards that celestial paradise of delight. There we shall not see a cherub guarding and defending the entrance with a fiery sword, as in the garden of Eden, but we shall behold a mother most sweet and tender, most benevolent and compassionate, turning constantly her eyes of love towards us, who are still wearily treading our devious way in this land of exile, which, formerly, she trod with her blessed feet. We shall see her with hands outstretched towards this land of exile and trial, inviting us to rely upon her protection, "to do violence"[*] to ourselves in order that we may arrive at that kingdom which the blood of her divine Son has opened to our desires and our hopes. If, until now, we have been so unfortunate as to forget Mary, or have had for her only a weak devotion, which our works too often contradict, let us deplore our cold ingratitude, and burst the bonds of our illusions. The mercy of a mother is great; what then must be that of such a mother as Mary? But from this moment, let us have for her a devotion worthy of Jesus, whom we must love and glorify in Mary; worthy of Mary whom our brethren must learn to love and glorify, according to the example of all those who call themselves her servants. Formerly the patriarch Jacob saw in his dream a mysterious ladder, on the top of which leaned the Lord, who predicted the sublime future of his posterity, and he cried out in fear, "How awful is this place! it is truly the house of God and the gate of heaven."[†]

What shall we say of thee, O holy Virgin! with whom this same God deigned to contract the most binding and sweet ties of blood and nature? Ah! thou art forever worthy of our respectful fear, on account of thy admirable greatness, but thy maternal goodness with which thou openest for us the heavenly gates and pourest forth "in abundance the manna of all graces,"* inspires us with filial confidence. It is with this sweet thought that we acknowledge thee to be the "true gate of the Lord through which the just enter† into His eternal rest,‡" and through which we ourselves hope to enter. Pray then for us, all unworthy as we are,

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[*] St. Matt. xi, 12. [†] Gen. xxviii, 17.

Gate of Heaven, pray for us!

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* Ps. lxxvii, 23, 24. † Ps. cxvii, 20. ‡ Heb. iv, 10.

MEDITATION XLI.

STELLA MATUTINA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Morning Star, pray for us!

THOU art, O holy Mary, sweet and radiant to our eyes as the beauteous morning star! If thou dost not like the sun enlighten, warm, and fertilize all nature by thy rays, thou art, at least, as resplendent as the star which precedes "that king of day."* Who shall tell the beauty of that new day which thou didst announce to the earth, O happy Star! "Star of Jacob!" who didst appear on the horizon of idolatrous humanity,† to "enlighten those who were seated in the shadow of death?"‡ Who shall picture the happiness of the world in being enabled to hail in thee the approach of its deliverance, the sublime and holy aurora of the adorable "Sun of Justice,"§ which having veiled its splendor in thy chaste womb, afterwards showed itself to us in wonderful brightness, shedding beneficent rays over all nature, giving to those in error the light of truth, and to the unfortunate "children of death,"* the only true life everlasting. Star of salvation, thou hast shown a splendor worthy of the celestial light which dispels darkness;† thou hast been truly the "brilliant star of the morning,"‡ of that blessed day when the world beheld the rising of its redemption and ineffable regeneration. Oh! be thou forever blessed by every heart and tongue, for having been the inestimable pledge of reconciliation between heaven and earth,§ of sanctification by Jesus Christ,‖ of eternal salvation,¶ of our vocation to the kingdom and the glory of God.**

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* Ps. xviii, 6. † Num. xxiv, 17. ‡ St. Luke i, 76. § Malach. iv, 2.

And is not this mystical Star of morn even now a pledge of hope, a pledge of salvation? "Take away Mary," says St. Bonaventure, "and what will become of us poor unfortunate creatures, in the midst of darkness, deprived of a sweet light?" Alas! who does not know that there are perilous moments, when the light of faith is obscured and gives way to thoughts contrary to divine teachings, moments when we feel violently impelled to that which we despise and detest from the bottom of our hearts, when the imagination is inflamed and carried away so far, as even to take complacency in objects which horrify, when the false charm fades and calm returns? But if we then raise a suppliant voice to that Star of benediction, she delays not to shed on us her consoling rays and thereby restore our serenity. Again, who does not know by sad experience, that there are hours of bitter sadness, of dark discouragement, when the heart seems ready to fail unless supported by supernatural power? If in these hours of trial and anguish, our fervent sighs call Mary to our help, she soon dissipates the storm, for "in all the tempests that assail us here below," says St. Bernard, "it suffices to look to that tutelar star, if we desire to escape shipwreck."

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* I Kings xxvi, 16. † Eccles. 1, 7. ‡ Apoc. xxii, 16. § Colloss. i, 20. ‖ I Cor. i, 30. ¶ Heb. v, 9. ** I Thessal. ii, 12.

Let us then fervently implore the help of Mary, and beg her to put to flight the "powers of darkness,"* just as the first rays of the light of day compel "ferocious beasts to re-enter their dens."† Let us beg her to conduct us safely through the dangerous sea of this life to the harbor of heaven. She delights in saving the sailor who confides in her holy protection; and the grateful mariner repeats in far distant lands, the glory of "the star of the sea," and sings with ardor the name of the "Virgin of good help." How much more does

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* Ephes. vi, 12. † Ps. ciii, 22.

Mary love to sustain, direct, and save the pious Christian who invokes her amidst the storms of the heart, of the spirit, of the mind, and in the midst of the tempests of the senses? Should not we be grateful and faithful to our heavenly benefactress, and honor her by a life as pure as the rays of her light; we, who have so often been consoled by the sweet splendor of that cherished Star?

O thou assured asylum of the imperilled mariner! Virgin ever ready to assist those in danger, save us from the storms and shipwrecks of this tempestuous sea, whereon our frail barks sail towards a happy or a miserable eternity. Dark clouds may encompass us while we are tossed on the waves, yet, never shall they hide thee from our eyes, O Star ever brilliant, ever consoling, ever protecting! In following thy sweet light we can never go astray; in imploring thee we find our hope; under thy guidance there is no fatigue, with thy help we cannot fall, under thy protection we cannot fear, under thy auspices we shall arrive at the term of all our desires; and as the star of the sea directs the pilot into port, so thou also dost conduct Christians to glory.

Deign, O Mary, to be propitious to those who in calm as in storm will unceasingly say with tender love,

Morning Star, pray for us!

MEDITATION XLII.

SALUS INFIRMORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Health of the weak, pray for us!

SUFFERINGS! Behold the inseparable companions of humanity! For one child of Adam who passes happy and joyful through the voyage of life, a thousand others are the prey of infirmities, more or less painful, and drag out a lingering existence in tears and sighs, and sometimes in fearful agony.

But in the midst of the sorrowful cries of suffering humanity, a sweet name full of charms is heard from the lips of the infirm Christian, and that name piously invoked, soothes pain, reanimates failing strength, assuages the most inveterate evils, and heals incurable diseases: it is the name of Blessed Mary. To what heart after that of Jesus can the Christian sufferer address himself, or by what heart be better understood! Ah! has not the heart of

Mary learned compassion in the contemplation of the long and painful sufferings of her adorable Son? When she stood at the foot of the cross, did she not receive from her divine Son all the faithful as a heritage in the person of the beloved disciple?* Did she not at that moment, with unheard-of tenderness, receive us all into the embraces of her incomparable charity? And does not he who invokes that heavenly mother in his infirmity know that her power is equal to her love? The devotion of the faithful has erected monuments of gratitude to the saints in some particular places only, but to Mary they are raised in all parts of the Christian world. Who has not heard of the celebrated sanctuaries dedicated to the Blessed Mother? and who that has had the happiness of visiting them did not feel his heart piously moved, in beholding offerings made by the faithful for innumerable benefits obtained through her intercession. Inscriptions engraven through gratitude; divers presents offered at her shrines; figures of gold or silver deposited at her feet as trophies of her power over diseases which had baffled the art of man, staffs which helped the suppliant to reach the threshold of the holy place, and which her intercession had rendered unnecessary; all these suspended on the sacred walls, as simple and touching memorials for her glory. Oh! how eloquently do these things speak to faith, how lively the confidence which they inspire towards her whom the Church calls "Health of the weak!" Mary does not indeed always obtain what we desire, because, in some cases, the realization of our wishes, far from being conducive to our eternal happiness, would be prejudicial to it. But that Mother of grace is always our help in infirmity; she endows the Christian sufferer with strength and patience; fills him with resignation and calm during sleepless nights and weary days, excites him with the same sentiments that animated the pious Job when he exclaimed: "That this be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, He spare not, nor I contradict the words of the Holy One."*

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* St. John xix, 26.

And when the hour appointed by the Lord arrives, the death of him who is nnder the patronage of Mary, is neither sad nor terrible, but peaceful and serene as the sweet passage from the trials of combat to the joys of victory, the passage from this vale of tears to the glorious kingdom where God Himself "wipes away all tears from the eyes of the elect."† Let us, with entire confidence, have recourse to the Blessed Virgin in all the afflictions which God is pleased to send us; and let us never cease to implore her influence with the adorable Jesus, remembering the words of St. Bernard, "God has given her absolute power in heaven and on earth; He has placed life and death in her hands." Let us implore her powerful aid for that last moment which is to decide our eternal lot, and let us live as being daily exposed to death.*

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* Job vi, 10. † Apoc. vii, 17.

O thou, whose tender heart can say much more truly than St. Paul, "Who is weak and I am not weak?"† be thou forever glorified for having so often shown thy power by relieving and curing our corporeal infirmities! Ah! thou art to us all in our sufferings a living resource;‡ and we bless thy divine Son for having invested thee with the secret virtue which remedies every evil,§ while the pool of Probatica at Jerusalem offered health only to him, who first went down, after the water had been agitated by the angel of the Lord.||

We supplicate thy divine Son to make us feel thy holy influence, especially at that decisive hour when we shall be on the brink of eternity. O sweet Virgin! who deignest to receive with maternal tenderness the last sigh of him who recommends himself confidently to thee, obtain for us that, at the last moment, we may feel in its full extent the efficacy of the pious invocation of the Church,

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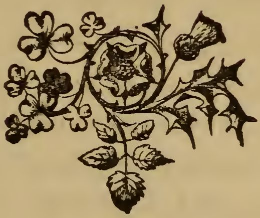
* Cor. xv, 31. † Cor. xi, 29. ‡ Ps. cii, 3. § Luke vi, 19. || St. John v, 4.

Health of the weak, pray for us!



MEDITATION XLIII.

REFUGIUM PECCATORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Refuge of Sinners, pray for us!

IT IS the nature of man to dread appearing before him whom he has offended, even to testify his repentance and ask for pardon, and much more so when the guilty party is greatly inferior to him who has been offended, and if ingratitude has been shown towards a generous benefactor. What relief, what consolation when a mutual, devoted, and influential friend offers to facilitate a reconciliation; but if that friend be the mother of him whose clemency is solicited, and if she deign to interpose her powerful influence with her son who is full of tenderness towards her, what joy, what happiness for the offender! Sinners, whoever you may be, bless, oh! bless the holy Mary, who comes with inexpressible goodness to place herself between you and her adorable Son, whose incomparable benefits you have despised, whose infinite majesty you have audaciously offended! Ah! you are, no doubt, too guilty! If you look only to the God-Savior, whom you have so deeply outraged, will you not be tempted to flee from before the face of the Lamb,* from before the avenging "Lion of the tribe of Juda,"† and throw yourselves into the abyss of despair? But behold this august Mother casting on you her eyes full of sweetness and mercy, invoking in your favor the remembrance of the blessed days when the Man-God reposed in her arms, thus making her the depository of His infinite graces! Were you a thousand times more guilty, have courage; she is powerful enough to obtain your pardon, and her goodness impels her to ask it. Can she be ignorant that the heart of her divine Son is filled with mercy for the unfortunate children of Adam, who, by sin, make themselves slaves of Satan? Ah! no one on earth ever manifested for them so tender an interest as Jesus, His love being so great that His enemies made it a subject of reproach and accusation.‡ But has not His sweet mother shown her affection more plainly than any other creature? Did she not, when ascending into heaven, carry with her into that abode of happiness a heart good and always sensitive to the loss of souls redeemed by the blood whose price she knew so well? "Her mercy has become commensurate with her glory," says St. Bonaventure. "Now that she reigns with her Son, Jesus, her compassion is so much the greater as she beholds more clearly the misfortune of men" who do not acknowledge the admirable mystery of redemption.

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* Apoc. vi, 16. † Apoc. v, 5. ‡ St. Matt. ix, 11.

The holy doctors when speaking of her kind compassion for sinners, exalt her immeasurably. St. Ephrem calls her, "the most powerful resource of sinners, the true port of the shipwrecked." "Thou art their only hope, O Mary," cries out St. Augustin. "O Mary," says St. Bonaventure, "the greatest sinner does not repel thee, but thou receivest him with maternal tenderness, and leavest him not until he is reconciled with his formidable Judge." Adoration, praise, eternal benediction to God who has opened such an asylum for the deplorable misery of sinners, and confidence, boundless confidence in Mary! When we pray to her to obtain the forgiveness of our sins, the conversion of our brethren, or the cure of our spiritual infirmities, let us have unlimited confidence. When discouragement or even despair threatens to ruin our good resolutions and desires to practise virtue, let us sing with the Church: "Hail! O Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope." St. Peter in a rapture saw a number of animals which were impure according to the Jewish law, purified and taken into heaven.* In like manner, O Mary! we behold a multitude of souls whom crime had sullied, converted by thy intercession, washed from their sins and conducted to the haven of eternal salvation.† Ah! thou art truly, for the greatest sinner, a more secure asylum than was the fortress of Bethsura for those who had abandoned the law of the Lord,‡ safer than the altar which Adonias took hold of, that he might escape the resentment of King Solomon.§ Ah! how many times might the just Judge when disarmed by thy favorable intercession say to thee as David to Abigail, "without thee, this day I should have struck with death this guilty man"?‖ How many times hast thou deigned to remember the weak tribute of our homage offered to thee by hearts which may, alas! with too much reason be compared to the sinner Rahab or to the children of Babylon,¶ and thou hast saved them from the infernal abyss. Increase, O Mary! and unceasingly multiply the proofs of thy admirable goodness to those, who, blind and foolish, run to their eternal ruin. By the strict bonds of charity, they are our own members,* and therefore we say,

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* Acts x. † Ps. cvi, 30. ‡ Macc. x, 14. § III Kings i, 50. ‖ 1 Kings xxv, 33. ¶ Ps. lxxxvi, 4.

Refuge of sinners, pray for us!

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* I Cor. xii, 27.

MEDITATION XLIV.

CONSOLATRIX AFFLICTORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Consolation of the afflicted, pray for us!

WHERE shall we find souls without affliction, hearts without anguish, eyes without tears? This world is for man a school of misfortune, wherein he must learn to elevate himself to God by humility, by prayer, by due aspiration to a better world. To all the afflictions of life is added the natural fear of death, which is inevitable, and which, at every step, presents itself to us under diverse forms, and seems to say, "It will soon be your turn." Ah! did we but know the anguish, the cruel deceptions, the deep sorrows, the inconsolable mournings, the trials of the soul, known only to God, and which reduce it almost to despair, would we not be tempted to cry out with Bossuet, "We must live,—how fearful is the thought."

God in His admirable providence has deigned to prepare for Christians an inexhaustible source of ineffable consolation, in the midst of all these pains; it is the heart of Mary, a heart filled with compassion, the heart of such a mother as has never been, nor never shall be again in this world; of a mother who identifies herself with her children; who, in a manner, forgets herself "to weep with those who weep,"* and by her tender sympathy to comfort them amid their severe afflictions.

Oh! what an admirable gift from the Lord art thou, O Mary, unto us who are sighing and weeping. Beloved Mother! the remembrance alone of thee, is powerful enough to lighten the oppressed heart, to sweeten the bitterness with which it overflows, and to heal its most painful wounds. Thou wast thyself excessively afflicted, thou, so holy, thou, the Mother of our God, thou didst drink of a chalice of affliction which was too bitter for human endurance; thou wast plunged in an ocean of profound and poignant grief, yet, thou wast so resigned, so calm, so entirely submissive to the divine will. Where is the sinner who does not feel himself relieved in his affliction, when he considers that, notwithstanding thy innocence, thou didst have so great a portion of bitter grief and of inexpressible sufferings? Who does not feel a sentiment of pious consolation when he thinks of the tender interest, the lively sympathy, the devotedness and compassionate charity thou dost manifest in our regard? Yes, our most holy Mother has for us poor, afflicted sinners, a universal and benevolent pity far beyond our comprehension. The celestial Spouse compares the goodness and mildness with which all her words were impressed during her sojourn upon earth, with all that is sweetest in nature. "Thy lips," He says, "are as the comb which distils honey; milk and honey flow from thy tongue."* Again wishing to express all that sweetness of Mary, He says that He is Himself attracted by it, "Arise, come, O my beloved, let thy voice be heard in my eyes, for thy voice is sweetness itself."† St. Bernard has said well, that "all in her breathed benignity and benevolence; that she was all to all and showed to all a superabundant charity." "O Mary!" exclaims the same holy Doctor, "O Mother of unspeakable amiability! yes, thy name ever penetrates the heart with that divine sweetness with which the Lord enriched thy beautiful soul." "No, no; there is not in heaven among all the saints," adds St. Antoninus, "one heart that compassionates our miseries as does that of Mary."

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* Rom. xii, 15.

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* Cant. iv, 11. † Cant. ii, 13, 14.

Let us then go to this admirable consolatrix in all our sorrows, but principally in those relating to our spiritual welfare; let us pour them into her maternal heart; she will not disappoint our confidence, for "to those in anguish she is a sweet help," says St. John Damascene, "and the surest remedy in all our moral evils."

Who can, O blessed Virgin, who can fathom the length, the breadth, the height, and the depth* of thy merciful bounty? Compassion was born with thee, it grew with thy years,† it existed even before the foundation of the Church, as the morning star amidst the clouds; afterwards it appeared as the moon in its gentle brightness, and since thy Assumption, it has shone with all the brightness of the king of day.‡

O thou, whom, after God, we love to call our consolation and our life,§ our hope in affliction,‖ thou whom God has appointed to change into joy our days of sorrow and of mourning, as He appointed the pious Esther to console and succor His people; be thou also forever our help in our desolation, and in our sufferings we will have resource to thee with that lively faith, that sincere piety, which should distinguish thy true servants.

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* Ephes. iii, 18. † Job xxxi, 18. ‡ Eccles. 4, 6, 7. § Tob. x, 4. ‖ Jer. xvii, 17.

Grant that our tears, pains, tribulations, and sorrows may turn to the greater good of those who say to thee with the sincerity of a filial heart,

Consolation of the afflicted, pray for us!

MEDITATION XLV.

AUXILIUM CHRISTIANORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Help of Christians, pray for us!

THOU wast at all times, O Mary, the protecting arm of the disciples of thy Son and of the Church, their mother, but especially so when everything seemed to conspire for the annihilation of the work of thy divine Jesus.

Did not Islamism, in the sixteenth century, invade Europe and threaten to destroy Christianity? A formidable fleet appeared with arrogance and pride, under the sign of the crescent in the gulf of Lepanto. The vessels of the Christians, though inferior in number, hesitated not to arrange themselves in battle array under thy auspices, and John of Austria, their chief, made a vow to visit in person thy august sanctuary of Loretto. Meanwhile, the citizens of Rome made the solemn procession of the Rosary, addressing to thee most ardent supplications for the success of the Christian arms; meanwhile the saintly Pope Pius V. cried out suddenly, "the Christian fleet is victorious." In fact, it was not long ere the official news of the defeat of the Mussulmans was received, and, in memory of so wonderful an evidence of thy protection, the same Sovereign Pontiff added the new invocation of "Help of Christians, pray for us," to the Litany which we love to sing in thy honor. This beautiful title, O Mary, thou hast been often pleased to justify, since the immortal day of Lepanto.

In the seventeenth century, 230,000 Turks were defeated under the ramparts of Vienna, by a Christian army incomparably less in numbers. It was within the octave of thy Nativity, on the same day that solemn supplications were offered in the City of Munich to the "Help of Christians;" and the honor of this brilliant triumph was given to thee by the victor himself, who, on the morning of the battle, having assisted at the Holy Sacrifice, and participated in the divine Mysteries, had encouraged his officers, promising the help of Heaven through thy intercession. Thirty years later, the Emperor Charles VI. gained a signal victory over the same enemies of the Christian name, on the very day, when, at Rome, they implored thy protection. Again, on the day of the octave of thy glorious Assumption, Corfu sounded thy praises in beholding far from its ramparts, those same infidels who had beseiged it.

Admirable series of victories obtained over the crescent by the power of Mary! they shall live forever in the hearts of all the pious faithful who owe to Mary the consolation of celebrating, each year throughout the world, the festival of the most Holy Rosary.

But this was not enough for the glory of the Blessed Virgin. Divine Providence had decreed that the title of "Help of Christians," should be celebrated by a special festival. During his long and painful struggle with the most dreaded prince and ruler of modern times, Pope Pius VII. never ceased to invoke that heavenly help. His confidence was not in vain. Napoleon, that powerful Colossus, fell; the venerable Pontiff reëntered the Eternal City in triumph, and decreed that the anniversary of his return from exile should be annually solemnized by the special festival of Mary, Help of Christians.

Yes! constant, powerful help, universal succor! Help against the force of arms, against the violence of political power, against persecution, against all the storms which hell raises against the Church of God on earth, and which tend to retard its precious conquests, to diminish the number of the faithful, and to lead crowds of souls into perdition! Let us each day invoke with renewed fervor the Virgin Helper, that she may preserve us from these dangers. We should also implore her for ourselves, that she would confirm our faith, and aid us in the practice of virtue; that she would aid us amid those scandals of all kinds which surround us; for it is written, "Let him who stands, beware lest he fall."* Then let us address ourselves to her with all the confidence which she merits. "All submit to her empire," says St. Antoninus. "Thy name alone after God's is all powerful," exclaims St. Bonaventure.

O Mary! "invincible buckler"† of Christians, who have so glorified the protection which thou didst afford them; to thee much more than to the victorious Judith, it is meet to say: "Woe be to the nation which attacks my people, for the all-powerful Lord shall avenge them."‡

Mayst thou be ever glorified for having so often vanquished the "force of arms,"§ and given us so many consoling motives for placing our trust in thee; aid us against all the enemies of the children of God and of Holy Church.

With her we love to say, "Deign continually to succor those who sigh under the weight of their miseries. Deign to animate the pusillanimous, to fortify the weak, to console those who weep. Pray for all Christian people, intercede for the clergy, intercede for the sex which is particularly devoted to thee. Let all the faithful experience the effects of thy salutary aid, and in particular those who love to think of thee, and to claim thy help with sweet and filial confidence."

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* I Cor. x, 12. † Wisd. v, 20. ‡ Jud. xvi, 20. § Ps. lxxv, 4.

Help of Christians, pray for us!

MEDITATION XLVI.

REGINA ANGELORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of Angels, pray for us!

LET us rise on the wings of faith and love to that blessed country where "God himself is the infinite reward" of the elect,* and where He gives to each one according to His merits:† what do we there behold? The thrones of Pontiffs, martyrs, apostles, prophets, and patriarchs exalted in grandeur and glory; yet, midst all these, we seek in vain for Mary. Let us ascend still higher and behold the choirs of angels, the cherubim and the seraphim, all those "legions"‡ of pure spirits who stand before "the Holy of holies"§ as unalterable suns. Is it among these that the Virgin by excellence enjoys beatitude? No, no; higher still, above angels and archangels, near the throne of the adorable risen God-man, another throne, second only to that of Jesus, meets our view and strikes us with amazement.

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* Gen. xv, 1. † St. Matt. xvi, 27. ‡ Dan. vii, 10. § Dan. ix, 24.

On this throne, elevated above all the inhabitants of heaven, is seated a daughter of Eve, only less resplendent than her divine Son, brighter and more glorious than the highest angel of the heavenly hierarchy; she is the Blessed Virgin, the Masterpiece of creation, the Queen of all the angels. "She is," says St. Epiphanius, "above all other beings, God alone excepted." "Her dignity as Mother of the Creator," says St. John Damascene, "makes her queen of all other creatures." "She, who has the right to call God her Son," exclaims St. Bernard, "is she not superior to all the choirs of angels?" Ah! render homage, O celestial spirits! render homage to the Mother of your divine King, you who adore "the blessed fruit of our beloved Virgin." "Jesus has placed upon her head," says St. Antoninus, "a diadem of magnificence and glory, which makes the angels subject to her as to their divine Queen." And was it not the future grandeur and glory of Mary, which, in anticipation, the Archangel Gabriel honored when he saluted her with such veneration and in terms so high and magnificent? Those terms of veneration were legitimately due to her, who was to be invested with the admirable titles of Daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son, and Spouse of the Holy Ghost, and beneath whose feet the sublime rank of the divine maternity was to place all the grandeur of heaven and earth. Besides, could the messenger of the Most High have failed to recognize his queen in her whom he saluted as Mother of his divine King? And if the angels are infinitely beneath the human nature of the Incarnate Word, since, says St. Paul, God hath not said to any angel as He said to Jesus, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,"* it is impossible that they should not be inferior to her who could also say to this same Jesus, "Thou art my Son.† I bore thee in my womb, and gave thee suck."‡

But who is this creature so great, before whom the angels bow down in respect and admiration; whom they rejoice to serve and surround with their homages,§ repeating with holy transport, "Reign, reign eternally over us, thou with thy divine Son."|| Ah! she is the lowly daughter of Joachim and Anne; she is the young, humble virgin, the betrothed of a mere artizan; she is the youthful mother, so worthy of compassion, who found in Bethlehem only a stable, a crib and a little straw on which to lay her new-born babe; who, to save the precious life of her adorable Son, had to fly as an exile into a strange land; who, even after the glorious resurrection and ascension of her divine Son, led a hidden and retired life. The way to glory, eternal glory, alone worthy of the name, is by the path of humility. To be little in the eyes of others and in our own; to be great in those of the Lord by an exalted virtue, without hypocrisy and without show; this is the precious secret taught us by Mary in her life, as also by Jesus in His divine lessons and examples, which instruction He still continues in the ineffable mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Let us imitate Him, let us imitate His sacred Mother, let us learn how to humble ourselves that we may be one day exalted eternally!

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* Heb. i, 5. † Ibid. ‡ II Machab. vii, 27. § Dan. vii, 10.
|| Judges viii, 22.

Hail, Queen of Heaven! hail, sovereign of the angels! who, after God, is greater than thou, who didst bear in thy womb the God of infinite majesty, and to whom He deigned to submit? "A miracle on both sides," exclaims St. Bernard, "a miracle of humility in the Son, a miracle of grandeur and elevation in the Mother!"* Ah! from the height of thy sublime throne forget not thy servants on earth; rather turn on them the compassionate eyes of thy sweet mercy; deign to help and sustain us unceasingly in the way of salvation, until we leave this world of trials; deign to send our Guardian Angel to visit and console us if the divine justice should condemn us to the expiatory fire, soon to conduct us thence to heaven. May we merit these inestimable favors by saying always with sincere piety,

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* St. Matt. xxiii, 12.

Queen of angels, pray for us!

MEDITATION XLVII.

REGINA PATRIARCHARUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of Patriarchs, pray for us!

FROM the beginning of the world, the holy patriarchs "saluted from afar,"* with lively faith, and sweet and firm hope, that marvellous woman, whom, from the beginning, the Lord had declared chosen to give birth to the Savior of the world. In heaven, they offer her with unequalled joy, the tribute of their veneration and love, because through her, Jesus introduced them into the "eternal tabernacles."†

First, Adam, in Mary admires and blesses the new Eve, the true "mother of the living,"‡ whose "foot crushed the head of the infernal seducer"§ of the first Eve, her whose divine Son came into the world to repair, in a wonderful manner, the primitive fall of which the Church sings, "O happy fault, which has brought to us so great a Redeemer."

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* Heb. xi, 13. † Luke xvi, 9. ‡ Gen. iii, 20. § Gen. iii, 15.

After Adam comes Noah, chosen to be the second father of the human race, condemned to perish by the deluge; he admiringly contemplates her whom the Church calls our life and our hope; then Abraham, who did not hesitate to immolate to God his only son, on whose life naturally depended the existence of the people destined to produce the Messiah, honors and praises with holy transports the Mother of that divine and only Son whom Isaac prefigured,* and, in whom "all nations have been blessed," according to the promise of the Lord.†

Then it is Jacob who celebrates the glory of that Virgin of whom was born on earth the salvation of the Lord, who had been the object of his most ardent vows.‡ Next comes Joseph, the "Savior of Egypt,"§ who renders solemn homage to the Mother of "the Savior of the world,"‖ he, whose innocence, misfortunes, and elevation had so admirably prefigured the sanctity, sufferings, and glory of Mary. Moses then admires and praises her who gave to the universe the divine Emmanuel, who was like to him¶ a legislator, worker of miracles and deliverer. In fine, all the holy patriarchs, all the august chiefs of families blessed by God, happy inhabitants of "the heavenly Jerusalem,"[*] rejoice and acknowledge, that by her they have received the immortal crowns which encircle their radiant brows. They say to her, "Thy scepter is that of mildness and of justice, and thy right hand is full of wonders."[†] But what was it that gained for them those inestimable crowns? It was their fidelity to God, their belief in the future Redeemer, and their desire of seeing the dawn of the day of His coming,[‡] fidelity, faith, and desire, which, in the heart of the Blessed Virgin, rose to an inexpressible degree of perfection. If, for example, the fidelity and faith of Abraham were carried to such a wonderful degree of perfection, what must have been those of Mary, who is so much exalted above that holy patriarch in heaven, where each one holds the rank to which his merits entitle him? If, in the heart of Abraham there was such a desire of beholding the coming of the Messiah, that for it the divine Savior solemnly and publicly praised him in the streets of Jerusalem,[§] what must have been the vehement aspirations of her "to whom," as St. Proclus has said, "no patriarch could be compared"? As for us, Oh, ineffable happiness! we have not to desire a Redeemer, we have only to enjoy Him; we not only taste the consolation of sweet hope, but possess the delicious fruit of enjoyment. "Jesus descended from the highest heaven," visited this earth, enlightened, sanctified, and saved it. He has endowed it with most magnificent gifts, with most precious spiritual resources; moreover, He has taken up His abode in this vale of tears, which, no doubt, would have been too happy to have possessed Him only for a few years, or even for some moments. Alas! we ignore His adorable presence, and neglect to visit our divine Guest, who seems to forget Himself, and makes it His delight to dwell among the children of men.* Ah! let not that be said of us which St. John said of the Jews, contemporaries of our divine Savior, "there is one among you, and you know him not."†

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* Heb. xi, 19. † Gen. xxii, 17, 18. ‡ Gen. xlix, 18. § Gen. xli, 45. ‖ John iv, 42. ¶ Deu. xviii, 15–18.

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[*] Paralip. viii, 28. [†] Ps. xliv, 5. [‡] John viii, 56. [§] St. John viii, 56.

O Mary, sweet hope of the patriarchs, who didst possess in so intimate a manner Him whom they so ardently desired! make us appreciate the infinite happiness of possessing Him, and of being enabled to enjoy all the graces of which He is the inexhaustible source. As the promised Messiah had been the center of thy most ardent desires, so also the God-man was the object of all thy affections; and, under thy auspices, He has been the only object of the love and devotedness of the founders of illustrious orders, whom piety styles "patriarchs of the new law." May it be the same with us, O holy Mother! may faith be so deeply rooted in our hearts, that we may see and feel that, by the admirable mystery of the continued presence of Jesus amongst us, the earth has become a heaven, and that all our thoughts, desires, and affections should be centered in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. In order to fulfil faithfully this pious duty for the glory of thy divine Son, we repeat,

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* Prov. viii, 31. † St. John i, 26.

Queen of Patriarchs, pray for us!

MEDITATION XLVIII.

REGINA PROPHETARUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of prophets, pray for us!

THE prophets of old, those living prodigies of supernatural knowledge, drew the most perfect picture of the Messiah, centuries before his advent. The most ancient gave the first trait, those who followed successfully achieved what their predecessors had left undone. The nearer the event approached, the brighter were the colors, and when the picture was completed, the last, while retiring, designated the holy precursor who was to say, " Behold the Lamb of God laden with the sins of the world."

But, in describing the varied phases of the mortal life of our Savior, the diverse qualities of His sacred person, His ministry, and the wonderful fruits of His mission, could they not also foresee the august mother of the God-man, the admirable daughter of Eve, whose glorious coöperation in the salvation of the world,* they knew the Lord had decreed from the beginning?

Ah! no doubt the sweet and majestic figure of Mary rose before them more than once, and made them leap for joy while writing the prophetic history of her divine Son. How much were you rejoiced, O David,† Ezechiel,‡ and Isaiah,§ to whom special lights revealed the grandeur of the Virgin Mother? Now that in the region of eternal glory, they clearly contemplate her brilliant and magnificent destiny, her jeweled crown of "universal sovereignty over all creatures," how joyfully do they render homage to their celestial queen! with what veneration do they honor the brilliancy of that divine light with which the Lord has replenished her! Each prophet was supernaturally enlightened only on some points in the history of the Redeemer; but thou, O Queen of the prophets, didst embrace the whole series of their predictions, and didst penetrate all their meaning! St. Ligouri says, "Thou didst see with thy own eyes, thou didst hear with thy own ears what they had so much desired to see and hear."|| They, burning with the sacred fire of inspiration, have written in so sublime a manner, that we are charmed and transported out of ourselves by the sublimity of their prophecies. And thou, filled with the Holy Spirit,* exulting with joy in God thy Savior,† didst chant to His glory a hymn of thanksgiving, in which is displayed a richness of sentiment, a sublimity of expression, and a divine enthusiasm, to which the ancient oracles of the Most High can not be compared. Thou, the humble and poor daughter of the tribe of Juda; thou, the spouse of an obscure artizan of Nazareth, didst predict that "all generations should call thee blessed."‡ Most wonderful prophecy! which, during eighteen centuries, has been accomplished by all people and all nations. Thou didst also prophecy the future destiny of the Church of the true people, the new Israel which the Lord has taken under His protection, remembering His merciful promise to Abraham§ and His posterity which is to last throughout all ages, and the continual combats and triumphs of the Church have never ceased to give evidence of the divine prescience which gave thee power to read futurity.

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* Gen. iii, 15. † Ps. xliv, 11, 12. ‡ Ezech. xliv, 2. § Is. vii, 14. || Luke x, 24.

"How happy are we," says the great Bishop of Meaux, "to whom God has deigned to pledge Himself by such a promise. He could have given us what He pleased, but why did he make the promise if it was not, as Mary said, to extend His mercy throughout all ages"? a mercy so admirably manifested by the advent of the Savior, who Himself promised to continue His work until "the end of time."* Let us, with unshaken confidence, rely on His divine word, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."† From the faithful fulfilment of the prophecies of Mary, and the promises of her divine Son which have been accomplished even from the cradle of Christianity to our days, let us learn to enliven our faith in all the other promises of the Gospel, and entirely abandon ourselves to the blessed hopes of religion, that they may absorb all the illusions with which the world tempts us.

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* Luke i, 35. † Luke i, 47. ‡ Luke i, 48. § Ibid. 54, 55.

When, O Mary! in the ecstasy of thy gratitude the future was opened before thy eyes, thou didst predict the pious and solemn veneration, which, through all generations, would be offered to thee,‡ and also the perpetuity of the Church which must live, combat, and triumph until the end of time.§ Ah! it is a sweet consolation for us to behold the accomplishment of thy prophecy, through so long a series of centuries. With lively joy we acknowledge in thee, as does St. Basil, her whom Isaias had designated by the title of "prophetess,"‖ and to whom the seers of Israel* gave testimony† in their predictions regarding the divine Redeemer. Deign, O thou whom David called "the glorious daughter of the king clothed round about with varieties,"‡ deign to obtain that we may always join our feeble voices to the universal concert which proclaims thee "blessed."§ May we ever rely on the infallible oracles of the gospel, and never be led astray by scandals or persecutions, but "persevere faithfully unto the end"‖ in faith and in the good works which it alone inspires.

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* St. Matt. xxviii, 20. † St. Matt. xxiv, 35. ‡ Luke i, 48.
§ St. Matt. xxviii, 20 ‖ In Is. proph. c, 8.

Queen of prophets, pray for us!

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* Is. xxx, 10. † Acts x, 43. ‡ Ps. xliv, 15. § Luke i, 48. ‖ St. Matt. x. 22.

MEDITATION XLIX.

REGINA APOSTOLORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of the Apostles, pray for us!

THAT which all the philosophers most renowned for their science, the most eloquent orators, the most powerful and learned men could never have thought of undertaking, that which they could never have accomplished, had they dared put their hands to the work, twelve poor, ignorant Galileans, without any human resources, not only essayed but executed with inconceivable success. The Apostles spread themselves over the world to conquer it, to establish a new worship, a new sacrifice, a new law, having for its author Jesus Christ, who had been crucified in Jerusalem. To conciliate and gain souls, "come," said they, "come and serve Jesus. Whoever follows Him shall be happy after death; meanwhile he shall have to suffer even unto death." To preach this doctrine they braved all torments, even death itself, and they soon attracted* the pagan universe to the adoration of Jesus and the practice of gospel duty. Divine zeal, divine devotedness, divine success! But what part had Mary in this work that she merited the title of "Queen of the Apostles"? Ah! that august Virgin, who, by the preëminence alone of her divine maternity, had merited that title, also greatly contributed to the formation, increase, and support of the rising Church.

Do we not behold her, from the beginning, during that pious retreat in which, according to the advice of the Savior, the Apostles prepared themselves to receive from above the virtue of the Holy Spirit,† persevering with them in prayer?‡ "And who," says St. Antoninus, "could think that she did not, on the day of Pentecost, receive with them the wonderful gifts with which they were endowed by the Holy Ghost? She received them so that nothing might be wanting to all the graces, to all the spiritual advantages which she could possess." "Yes, certainly," says St. Thomas, "the Blessed Virgin did receive the excellent gifts of wisdom, miracles, and prophecy." Doubtless, she was not to exercise the sacred ministry of the Apostles, but all these graces were granted as an ornament due to her dignity as Mother of God. Could such a Mother remain inferior to those who called themselves the "servants of Jesus,"* and of whom St. Anselm and St. Bonaventure have not hesitated to say, that "they were the disciples of her who had given Him birth?"† Undoubtedly it was Mary who revealed to the Apostles all the circumstances of the mysteries which they could not have witnessed, but which they were, in their turn, to make known to the world. It must have been she who communicated to them the most precious and consoling details of the hidden life of Jesus, for, according to the expression of the Gospel, "she kept all these words in her heart,"‡ so that, says Venerable Bede, "she might, in time, share them with the Apostles and Evangelists." How can we doubt that she was for them a source of light, when St. Ambrose says that "from her, St. John, that soaring eagle, drew the sublime ideas which he had of the Divinity of the Word?"

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* St. John xii, 32. † St. Luke xxiv. 49. ‡ Acts i, 14.

But again, she merits the title of Queen of the Apostles by her happy influence over the progress of the gospel. Her example was in itself a powerful lesson. "Was she not, in all things and everywhere, the most faithful copy of the divine Jesus, the shining mirror of His life?" says St. Laurence

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* St. Jas. i, 1. † St. Pet. i, 1. ‡ St. Luke ii, 19.

Justinian. Her conversation had a marvellous efficacy; it is written that "from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,"[*] and "the heart of Mary was," says St. Bernardine, "a furnace of the love of God, her prayers were an out-pouring most humble, most pure, most ardent; and how shall we express the zeal, the fervor, with which that holy Mother interceded for the development of the work of her divine Son?"

In order to imitate Mary, let us, as far as lies in our power, work for the good of the Church and those pious missionaries who are the successors of the Apostles. Let us be apostles ourselves by our example, our conversation, our coöperation in good works, so that by us, the name of our Savior may be glorified.[†]

O Mary! whom Jesus left on earth after His Ascension, that thou mightest exercise a zeal more than apostolic, and be the help and succor of His Church, thou who didst not only participate in all the gifts which the apostles received from heaven, but wast their light and their model, how justly art thou styled Queen of those twelve heroes whose names are written in the foundations of the City of God.[‡] May thy heart, so much inflamed for the glory of Jesus, communicate to us some sparks of that sacred fire which pious souls seek to scatter around them. Obtain that, by the works of a good and holy life,* we may be as lights shining upon our neighbors and cause them to glorify our heavenly Father.†

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[*] St. Matt xii, 34. [†] II Thessal. i, 12. [‡] Apoc. xxi, 10–14.

Queen of Apostles, pray for us!

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* Jas. iii, 13. † St. Matt. v, 16.

MEDITATION L.

REGINA MARTYRUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of Martyrs, pray for us!

WHO can tell, O Mary, the multitude of thy sorrows, which made thee exclaim with truth, that thy "affliction was deep and bitter as the ocean?" "Look and see if there be sorrow like to my sorrow;" like to that which makes my martyrdom.

We shudder at the sight of bloodshed; our nature cannot calmly behold another wounded by violence; it suffers intensely if the blood shed be that of a friend; more so, if it be that of a brother; more, ah! incomparably more, if it be that of a tenderly cherished son.

If the most loving mother be compelled to gaze on this sorrowful spectacle, how much more deep, how much more lively will be the painful impression! If the son whom she beholds immolated, be an only son, endowed with most rare qualities, ah! no human tongue can tell the extremity of her mortal suffering.

Thou wast that mother, O Mary, and Jesus was that only Son, truly incomparable, whose execution thou wast compelled to witness! O thou, whom the Church so justly styles the "Mother of Sorrows," tell us, for we can neither feel nor express it, tell us how the cruel sword transpierced thy heart,* tell us of thy agony when each blow nailed the hands and feet of thy Jesus; of thy anguish, of thy fearful suffering during the three hours thou hadst to contemplate thy amiable Son so cruelly suspended on an infamous gibbet; or rather be silent, O Blessed Mary! Keep, oh keep that heroic silence, so eloquent, so sublime, which thy deep sorrow imposed when standing on Calvary; that superhuman silence speaks infinitely more than all the cries, the sighs and tears of a desolate mother. Oh! how willingly wouldst thou have given thy life for Him! how great would have been thy consolation to have mingled thy blood with His! But no! it was necessary that thou shouldst be "more than a martyr," according to St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure, by suffering that, which, naturally speaking would have occasioned death, yet with the certainty that death would not come to end thy inexpressible torments. It was in this manner that thou didst acquire the title of "Queen of Martyrs," by the unheard-of excess of thy sufferings, in comparison with which, St. Anselm esteems as light all those of the heroes of Christianity, who, nevertheless, endured scourges, chains and prisons; who were stoned to death, sawed in two, tortured in every manner; "they of whom the world was not worthy."* But Calvary was not the sole theatre of the martyrdom of the Blessed Virgin. When the sacred body of the Savior was taken down from the cross, tradition tells us that it was placed in her arms, before being deposited in the sepulchre. Ah! who can conceive what must have passed in the heart of such a mother in that solemn and sorrowful moment? To hold in her arms the inanimate body of her only, her beloved Son; to view that body so cruelly bruised and torn; to contemplate with eyes of love, the deep wounds, whence blood so dear and precious had flowed for the regeneration of the world; to recall to mind in a lively manner all the frightful scenes of the Passion; oh! what torture! St. Augustin says that "all the dolors of Jesus were the dolors of Mary; that the cross and nails of the Son were the cross and nails of the Mother; therefore, all that she had suffered before, all that had torn her tender heart, was renewed with redoubled bitterness, with extreme desolation, and sufferings unequalled and without end."

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* Luke ii, 35.

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* Heb. xi, 36, 37, 38.

What a great lesson for us, children of the gospel! Jesus and Mary have entered into eternal glory through pains and sufferings; Jesus, who was sanctity itself; Mary, the most holy of creatures. And we, sinners by nature, sinners by will, shall we expect to arrive there by any other path? The Cross! behold the inheritance which the Man-God has left us in this world, and which is to become for us a sure pledge of the immortal and "incorruptible inheritance,"* which He has prepared as a reward for our resignation, patience and fidelity amidst trials; for it is written, "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him."† O tender Mother! who, at the foot of the cross, didst endure pains much more cruel than the martyrdom of the body; thou whose example and prayers have so happily encouraged "those who have conquered through the blood of the Lamb," who have sealed with their own blood the testimony for the Divine Word,‡ in whose name St. Stephen offers thee his palm and his crown, deign to compassionate our sufferings and sustain our weakness. Turn away the chalice from us, if it should become too bitter for our languid virtue, or rather obtain that we may courageously say to God with our Savior, "Thy will be done."[*] Grant that we may understand the great saying of our divine Master, that he who carries not his cross, walking in His footsteps, cannot be His disciple.[†] That we may ever have the happiness of "possessing our souls in patience,"[‡]

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* I. Peter i, 5. † II Tim. ii, 12. ‡ Apoc. xii, 11.

Queen of martyrs, pray for us!

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[*] St. Matt. xxvi, 42. [‡] St. Luke xiv, 27. [‡] St. Luke xxi, 19.

MEDITATION LI.

REGINA CONFESSORUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of Confessors, pray for us!

GLORY be to you, O noble confessors of the faith, who thought it "precious gain"[*] to acknowledge yourselves disciples of Jesus, even at the peril of your lives before the enemies of His name. Glory be to you, who, although Divine Providence gave you not such trials, always made open profession of belonging to your admirable Master, by the practice of evangelical virtue, and by the eminent sanctity of your lives. But yet much more be glory to Mary, your august Queen by so many titles.

You have, indeed, shown yourselves constantly the devoted servants of your divine Master; but did not Mary remain more intimately and courageously faithful to her adorable Son? Your hearts were penetrated with ardent and generous love for

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[*] Philipp. i, 21.

Him, but Mary's burned with a divine fire truly incomparable. You, for His love, braved dangers, outrages, and trials of every kind, but Mary shared in all the painful circumstances of the life of her divine Son, and in all the persecutions of which He was the object. How many times was he calumniated and injured by His enemies? and did not the injustice heaped upon the Son most cruelly recoil upon the Mother? Hear the scornful expression of those who refused to believe in Jesus, "Is He not the Son of her who is called Mary?"* Listen also to the derision, the mockeries, and the insults which the enemies of Him, who was divine Patience, heaped upon Him in the extremity of His sufferings; and Mary, standing at the foot of the cross, must have shared the expressions of hate, and the outrages offered by them. In the midst of all the injuries and blasphemous mockeries with which the enemies of thy Son filled the air, how great was thy faith, O Mary! How admirably were thy love and devotedness, O woman eminently the honor and glory of thy sex!† All the apostles of Jesus, except St. John, abandoned Him; their head, St. Peter, who had so loudly protested that he would be faithful unto death, denied Him thrice, confirming that denial by oath; but thou, in the presence of the furious Jews, in the presence of the executioners, covered with the blood of thy Son, didst display the heroism of thy great soul; thou didst surround the Victim with all thy adoration, love, and devotedness, at a time when heaven itself seemed to have abandoned Him. Who, then, can be compared to thee, O Mary, to thee, whose faith in the divine Redeemer was so magnanimous?

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* St. Matt. xiii, 55. † St. Matt. xv, 28

Moreover, who ever equalled the holy Virgin in the sublime practice of all the virtues which can characterize a saintly soul, and make of her life an admirable preaching of the gospel? or who is like to her in the possession of those precious gifts, which win an eminent rank in heaven? Purity, modesty, humility, sweetness, detachment, poverty, obedience, piety, ardent love of God, inexhaustible charity for one's neighbor, burning zeal for the glory of the Most High, perfect submission to His adorable will, absolute abandonment to His providence, patience in all trials; in a word, all virtues have shone in Mary in the highest degree. Therefore St. Peter Chrysologus calls her "the living assemblage of all the treasures of sanctity;" St. John Damascene "the sanctuary of all virtues."

Let us learn from this admirable Queen of Confessors to despise human respect, and to live as worthy disciples of Jesus Christ. Amidst the sarcasms of the world, let us lift up our heads, signed with the cross at Baptism and Confirmation; let us with holy courage defy the threats and contempt of the children of this world,* remembering the infallible oracle of Him who is to be their Judge as well as ours, "Whoever confesses my name before men, him will I confess before my Father who is in heaven; and if any one be ashamed of me, I also will be ashamed of him before my Father."† Neither let us forget that grave admonition of our divine Master, "let your good works shine as a light before men, and cause them to glorify your heavenly Father."‡

August Queen, before whose throne the confessors of the faith of Jesus prostrate themselves, paying homage; some with "crowns,"§ which, under thy guidance, they wore for His greater glory; others with heavenly wisdom, which shone in their writings, or good works, and which they received from thy sweet protection.|| O thou who didst, in all things and always, confess the name of the "thrice holy God,"¶ obtain for us the grace to stand firmly in the combats of faith,** in the midst of the impious and corrupt world that surrounds us! Thou who wast the most perfect created model of all evangelical virtues, obtain that we may render our faith honorable by our good works, "that the name and the doctrine of God be not, by us, exposed to the blasphemies of men,"* but that our good and holy lives may force them to be silent,† and our example cause them to glorify the Lord,‡ whom we humbly supplicate to grant this favor through thy benevolent intercession.

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* St. Luke xvi, 8. † St. Matt. x, 32, 33. ‡ St. Matt. v, 16. § Apoc. iv, 10. || Deut. xxxiii, 3. ¶ Eccles. xlvii, 9. ** I Tim. vi, 12.

Queen of confessors, pray for us!

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* I Tim. vi, 1. † St. Peter ii, 15. ‡ Ibid 12.

MEDITATION LII.

REGINA VIRGINUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of virgins, pray for us!

YES; thou, O admirable Mary, art the Virgin of virgins; thou, among all the daughters of Eve, wast the first, notwithstanding the prejudices of thy nation, to make to God the solemn promise of perpetual chastity! It was thou, who, according to the expression of St. Ambrose, "didst raise the standard of virginity;" thou, who didst practise that angelical virtue with such perfection, that St. John Damascene calls thee, "the treasury of virginal purity." It was assuredly neccessary that she, who was destined to such incomparable grandeur, should possess this virtue. "Purity brings one near to God," says the Holy Ghost, in the book of Wisdom.* It must then have been as perfect as possible in Mary, to render her worthy of the most intimate alliance with infinite Majesty; "an alliance so admirable," says Albert the Great, "that Mary could not be more closely united with the Divinity, unless she were totally identified with it."

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* Wisd. vi, 20.

But it is not only in this relation that all the virgins call Mary, "Queen of Heaven." Was she not their safeguard and model whilst they dwelt on earth? Ah! they knew well the value of purity, seeing that to a virgin was reserved the inestimable privilege of the divine Maternity.

They understood the honor which God conferred upon their sex in the person of Mary, and the immense benefit of woman's reinstatement, which has flowed from it; and their hearts desired to testify their gratitude to the Lord, by devoting themselves to serve Him, to love Him alone in this world; to contemplate and praise Him in solitude, or to serve Him in the persons of the poor and miserable. Who can enumerate the thousands of instances of virtue that have adorned those generations of virgins, which have continued from the foundation of the Church? How often has the world been amazed at seeing young and timid daughters of Mary, ready to meet every danger, unmoved at the sight of obstacles, threats or torments? Even at the present day, we behold numerous religious congregations, who, even at the peril of their lives, come forward and say to all suffering humanity, "be my father and my brethren," to every infirmity, every necessity of the mind and body, "be my mother and my sister." Noble and sublime spiritual posterity of the Blessed Virgin; ah! it is she who protects, who sustains you as "chaste spouses reserved for Christ,"* against the weakness of your sex; against the seductions of the world, and the assaults of hell, and often, when necessary, against executioners and the instruments of their cruelty! The Church puts in her mouth these words of Wisdom, "I cherish them who cherish me."† But the greatest testimony of love which can be given her, is the imitation of that virtue which most clearly shone in her, and which is most difficult to our fallen nature. It is the vow which like Mary you make, to lead in a mortal body the life of angels. It is in this same vow that the spirit of devotedness and self-sacrifice finds its source and its strength; for by disengaging the heart from family ties, it leaves it at liberty to consecrate all human activity to the service of God and to good works.

"She, who has no spouse save Jesus," says the Apostle St Paul, "occupies herself with the care of the things of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and in soul."‡ Let us admire this heavenly spirit, which, in the true Church, produces such wonderful fruits, envied by so many sects, which are sterile because separated from her. Let us beg the divine Jesus to give us a share, each according to our special vocation, of this zeal, this voluntary immolation for His glory; and to grant also that, according to our state, we may practise the sublime virtue, "which," according to the expression of St. Ambrose "makes heroes of martyrdom, and brethren of the angels;" and even raises our merit above that of the celestial spirits, for to "acquire angelical glory in mortal flesh," says St. Jerome, "is much more than to possess it by nature."

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* II Cor. xi, 2. † Prov. viii, 17. ‡ I Cor. vii, 34.

O sacred Queen of the virgins, who come in triumph to offer thee the homage of the lily of their purity with the palm of their victory; august Mother of the divine Lamb, who is "the chief and the guide of virginity,"* we glorify thee with joy for having, by thy example and succor produced and spread on earth the growth of so many virtues! Ah! deign to increase more and more the number of thy cherished daughters, who adorn the church as variegated flowers, and embalm it with a perfume whose sweetness is not of this world. Deign to inspire us with respect and love for a virtue which reflects such great honor on humanity, and which has its source in heaven, where, for its reward it enjoys the privilege of "following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."[*] O thou who art the leader of so many virgins who have attained to unheard-of felicity and glory, obtain that, drawn "by the odor of thy virtues,"[†] we may be brought to the "King of kings,"[‡] and may follow in the pure way which thy footsteps have marked out for us.

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* Jer. iii, 4.

Queen of virgins, pray for us!

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[*] Apoc. xiv, 4 [†] Cant. i, 3. [‡] Ps. xliv, 15.

MEDITATION LIII.

REGINA SANCTORUM OMNIUM, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen of all saints, pray for us!

THE saints have adorned the Church by beautiful and admirable virtues; they have astonished the world by the heroism of their zeal, their courage and devotedness and by the prodigies of their humility, patience and charity; they have entered into "the eternal dwelling"[*] with an abundant harvest of merits, which the Lord "has weighed in the balance of justice,[†] and which He has rewarded with an inappreciable reward."[‡]

O Mary, thou art their Queen! If among the faithful the saints have been as so many beautiful flowers adorning the garden of the earthly Spouse of Christ, thou hast shone in this mystic garden as the Queen of flowers. By thy incomparable example thou hast made known to the world the immense richness of grace with which thou wast replenished, a richness incomprehensible to all human minds, to all angelic spirits. All the saints have shown in their lives some traits of the life of their divine Master; each one has practised some particular virtue, and in the "house of His Eternal Father" where "there are many mansions,"* each one receives the special share of glory which he earned during his exile upon earth.

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[*] Eccles. xii, 5. [†] Job. xxxi, 6. [‡] Heb. x, 35.

O Mary! thou art their Queen! Thou didst possess in thy own person, all that each saint had as his particular merit. All the perfections of Jesus, our adorable Model, were reproduced in thee, as faithfully as they could be in any creature. Thou didst practise every virtue in so high a degree, and with such perfection that St. Anselm says, that after the sanctity of the Holy of holies there is not any nor can any be imagined like to thine. And now in thy heavenly country, thou art invested with a glory which is proportionate to thy merit; all the magnificence of the crowns of the saints is united in thy crown. Moreover, thy glory surpasses theirs, as much as their virtues are inferior to thine, because it is through the merits of Him whom thou didst give to the world, that the grace of practising these virtues has been given to them. The saints have with God a wonderful power in our favor. "The Lord," says St. Leo, "is truly admirable in giving them to us, not only as models but also as powerful protectors." Innumerable favors attest throughout the universe that they reign forever* in "the city of God,"† and that from their exalted thrones they also reign on earth by a mysterious influence. O Mary! of all these powerful intercessors, of all these "immortal kings,"‡ thou art the queen. Thou prayest not as they do, but "thou, in a manner, dost command." Can it be possible, O Blessed Virgin! that He who was born of thee, almighty though He be, would resist the power which He has given to thee His mother? "Thou demandest," says St. Antoninus, "and all thy desires are invariably accomplished."

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* St. John xiv, 2.

Ah! may this adorable Virgin, to whom all the saints pay homage for their crowns, be one day also our queen! What must we do to obtain all this? We must be saints on earth. To be saints is to lead "the life of God;"§ it is to possess grace, and labor constantly to keep and augment it in us; to love the Creator sincerely, "with all our mind, with all our heart, with all our strength;"|| for he who loves God in this manner and perseveres therein, is united to Him in an ineffable manner and "shall be saved."[*] He shall eternally in heaven "partake of the nature,"[†] the glory, and even of the beatitude of God. "Ah!" says St. Augustin, "let us raise our hopes and direct all our desires towards the eternal possession of God, who is the sovereign good and source of all goodness." Let us beware of incurring the anathema pronounced against those who contemn the true promised land, which is so worthy of being desired by all hearts.[‡]

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* Apoc. xxii, 5. † Ibid iii, 12. ‡ Ibid v, 10. § Eph. iv, 18. || St. Luke x, 27.

O Mary! who, in so admirable a manner, hast united in thyself all the merits and virtues of the saints, O thou who didst surpass them all in this world by thy virtues and privileges, and who in heaven art so superior to them by thy glory and power, with them and all the glorious inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem, we prostrate ourselves before thee, O august Mother of the Savior, at whose right hand thou art seated, vested in a royal mantle of a richness truly divine;[§] thou art exalted above all the elect, O living "dwelling of God,"[¶] as the summit of a mountain rises above all beneath it![||]

If we were to regard only thy grandeur, we would fear to raise our eyes to thee, O heavenly queen!

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[*] St. Matt. xxiv, 13. [†] St. Pet. i, 4. [‡] Ps. cv, 24. [§] Ps. xliv, 10. [¶] Eph. ii, 22. [||] Macc. iv, 1.

but we know also all thy charity, goodness and mercy, and our confidence in thee is unbounded.

By thy assistance we hope to lead lives of sanctity, and thereby to obtain a share in the kingdom of God, where we shall rejoice eternally for having in this world said to thee, with a tender piety worthy of thy sweet majesty,

Queen of all saints, pray for us!

MEDITATION LIV.

REGINA SINE LABE ORIGINALI CONCEPTA, ORA PRO NOBIS!

Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us!

TO THE great piety of Christendom we owe the sweet consolation of saluting Mary as "Queen conceived without original sin," for in these latter times, that definition was universally requested of the Holy See. The Scriptures call God "King"*in an absolute manner, to express the excellency of His supreme majesty. Was it not meet that we should honor the sovereignty of her who is above all, God excepted? and, after the invocation which calls her Queen of all Saints, what title could be more proper than that which honors her royal grandeur and her singular privilege of exemption from all sin; a privilege which of itself, would distinguish her among all the elect, even were she not superior in so many other respects; a privilege ever proclaimed by the tradition of the Church, the faithful echo of apostolic teachings?

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* Ps. xliv, cxliv.

In his discourse to the Consul Egius, St. Andrew himself gives to Mary the title of "immaculate," and compares her to the earth of which the first man was formed, and which had not yet received that malediction of the Lord, which was the consequence and chastisement of original sin. Origen, who lived near the apostolic age, calls her "formed in grace, exempt from the pestilential breath of Satan." St. Amphilochius hails her "without stain and without sin," St. Epiphanius, "more beautiful than all the army of angels, the Immaculate Mother who brought forth the divine Lamb into the world." St. Ephrem names her "the Virgin without spot, without corruption, an absolute stranger to sin and to every defect," and St. Cyril esteems her "preserved from the stain of original sin."

But what need have we to cite any other authority than the transmission of the primitive belief on this point? Who is ignorant that St. Jerome, St. Fulgentius, St. Ildefonsus, St. John Damascene, St. Peter Damian, St. Anselm, St. Bonaventure, and even St. Thomas, equally attest the uninterrupted tradition of the Church upon this doctrine? To the testimony of the holy doctors are united the monuments of the Churches of the East and the

West, the words of the sacred Liturgy, the usages of dioceses, the customs of religious orders. In fine, the Bishops assembled at the invitation of his Holiness, Pius IX., assured him, in a positive manner, of the attachment of the faithful to this belief; so that it has for its authority, antiquity, universality, and perpetuity, the principal bases of Christian dogma.

Again, who does not understand, that if the personal union of the divinity of Christ with His human nature, rendered it absolutely necessary that He should be conceived in the state of grace, so the divine maternity of Mary, which is the instrument of that union, could not be consistent with her conception in the state of sin? Can we believe that she, who, from the beginning of the world, had been declared by God safe from the sting of the infernal serpent, and who was even destined to "crush his head,"* could have been wounded by his venom or subjected to his power?† that she who was to be the reparatrix of the fall of Eve, and the true "mother of the living,"‡ could be inferior to Eve, created in the state of grace? that she, in fine, who, during nine months was to exist in the same corporeal life with the Incarnate Word, could be stricken the first moment of her existence with the divine displeasure, made odious to the Lord, and a "child of wrath?"[*] Oh no! a thousand times no! this could not be, O Virgin most tenderly cherished by God and man! Ah! he who has a knowledge of grace, of sin, and of the sanctity of God, understands and feels this perfectly through the ideas given him by Christianity; and he loves to proclaim before heaven and earth the impossibility of the Son of God being obliged to turn away His face from her who was to be His mother, as from an object insupportable in His eyes. The intelligent Christian also attaches an unequalled importance to an exemption from sin; like Mary, he esteems, above all things, the happiness of enjoying the friendship of God; he "watches and prays" continually, that he may be in the divine favor. By his good works he endeavors to bind this sacred tie more closely day by day, and to augment its sacred fruit.

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*Gen. iii, 15. † Ibid. ‡ Col. i, 13.

O Mary! O blessed Queen! O Queen by preëminence! O Queen conceived without sin! behold the last aspiration of our hearts towards thee; behold the last ray of glory that from earth we add to thy crown! What happiness for us to be able to say to thee, that "the Lord has possessed thee from the beginning,"[†] that thou art immaculate, all-beautiful, all-holy![*] Ah! be thou always the Queen of our hearts, O thou, who hadst the signal honor of being exempt from the original anathema which struck all men.[†] And that thy empire may be complete, obtain that we may most earnestly serve God with purity and fervor. To obtain this grace, we cry with profound humility and with all possible confidence and love,

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[*] Ephes. ii, 3. [†] Prov. viii, 22.

Queen conceived without sin, pray for us!

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[*] Cant. v, 2; iv, 7. [†] Esth. xv, 13.

MEDITATION LV.

AGNUS DEI, QUI TOLLIS PECCATA MUNDI, PARCE NOBIS DOMINE!

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord!

THE Church terminates all the invocations in honor of the Blessed Virgin by touching accents addressed to her adorable Son, under the emblem of the Lamb who effaces "the sins of the world."* First she calls on us to behold in Him the Judge whose clemency we ought to implore; the Lamb who is standing midst glorious thrones,† He who is to judge us by His cross, the standard of the Son of Man,‡ the sign of life or death§ to us all, according as our works shall be comformable or contrary to its maxims. Alas! we do not, through the light of faith, adequately look upon this character of judge, in the person of the divine Jesus. We love to consider Him under the image of the Good Shepherd,* of the kind Father,† or of a Parent full of tenderness;‡ and truly we ought to view Him in this manner, because He seems to take pleasure in representing Himself in the Gospel under these figures, emblematic of the richness of His goodness and love for us. But let us not forget that if we fail to correspond with such goodness and such love, we will be the more guilty for having known the truth, and smothered it in our hearts.§ We forget that the greater the goodness, the more ardent the love; the more wonderful the benefits, so much the deeper the obligation to be grateful. In fine, we forget that if we carry our ingratitude towards that "Lamb of God,"‖ so sweet, so amiable, so tender towards us, so far as to violate the absolute rights which He has over our will, our affections, and over all our faculties, we expose ourselves to find Him in the next life, only the terrible "Lion of the tribe of Juda,"¶ before whom the reprobate shall one day cry out: "Mountains and rocks fall on us, and hide us from the sight of Him who is seated on the throne, and from the anger of the Lamb."**

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* St. John i, 29. † Apoc. iv, 5; v, 6. ‡ St. Matt. xxiv, 30. § St. Luke ii, 34.

But is not this Lamb goodness, mildness, and love itself?††

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* St Luke xv. † Ibid. ‡ St. Matt. xxiii, 37. § Rom. 1, 18, 21. ‖ John i, 29. ¶ Apoc. v, 5. ** Apoc. vi, 16. †† John iv, 8.

Oh! yes, Jesus has proved it well; He has done for us things impossible for men to do, even when they love sincerely and ardently. But inasmuch as He is good, so is He just, all His perfections being equally infinite; and if we reject the sweet reign of His incomparable love, must not His justice have its reign after this life which is given to us that we may choose either one or the other? Let us judge ourselves strictly;* is it not true that we have very little gratitude? What do I say? Are we not really ungrateful? do we not treat Jesus as if we owed Him nothing? do we not at times act almost as if it were our interest to irritate His justice? And then, does not he who is overtaken by vengeance well deserve eternal perdition? Yes, when we consider the ineffable mystery of the Holy Eucharist, together with that of the Cross, we may truly say that love explains love. So when we consider on the other side the prodigies of the goodness and tenderness of Jesus for man, and on the other, the indifference, the obstinate and abominable ingratitude of so many sinners, we may well exclaim,—the Incarnation, the Redemption, the Holy Eucharist, and Heaven are a sufficient explanation of the existence of hell! Ah! hell itself, in the adorable designs of Providence, is as it were a last resource for urging man to work out his salvation, when other motives fail to make any impression. We who have, perhaps, many times deserved hell, we who have too long refused to acknowledge the rights of the Lamb of God, we who have abused His benefits and outraged His love, ah! let us entreat His forgiveness for our unworthy conduct, let us excite in ourselves sentiments of deep sorrow, and, considering our numberless sins against Him, let us prostrate ourselves at his feet, and, with hearts "truly humble"* and contrite, let us say, more by our deep emotion than by our words: "O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world,"† pardon us, O Lord! O sovereign Master of all things, pardon us! O sovereign "Judge of the living and the dead," pardon us!‡ It is true that before thee we are ungrateful creatures; we have despised thy ineffable love; we have foolishly treated thy rewards with contempt, as if heaven were not worth an effort; we have defied thy justice, as if the threats of thy chastisements were not serious. Ah! how guilty are we! But oh! treat us not according to our merits, but according to thy infinite clemency which we implore, striking our breasts with the penitent publican,§ and saying from the bottom of our hearts, "Spare, O Lord, spare thy people!"* that by the intercession of thy holy Mother, thy clemency may be glorified in us,† and that in us may be verified the words of the Prophet Joel, "The Lord hath spared His people."‡

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* I. xi Cor. 31.

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* Ps. l, 9 † St. John i, 29. ‡ Acts x, 42. § St. Luke xviii, 13.

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, spare us, O Lord!

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* Joel ii, 17. † Is. xxx, 18. ‡ Joel ii, 18.

MEDITATION LVI.

AGNUS DEI, QUI TOLLIS PECCATA MUNDI, EXAUDI NOS, DOMINE!

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, hear us, O Lord!

AFTER having besought the divine Lamb to pardon us, we entreat and supplicate Him graciously to hear the sighs we have raised to the throne of clemency. The first cry of our heart has been that of true repentance, uttered in accents of deep and bitter grief. The second, is the cry of humble prayer, which implores the Infinite Goodness to grant a great, a very great favor, on which depends our eternal salvation: graciously hear us, O Lord!

The Church here leads us to repeat the word "Lord," to "the Lamb who washes away the sins of the world,"* in order to impress our minds more and more deeply with the greatness, the infinite majesty of that generous Benefactor whom we have outraged, and to render us more contrite for our offences. It also reminds us that He to whom we raise our supplicating voice, is the absolute Master of all things, that "He holds the keys of death and of hell,"* and that, consequently, our prayers cannot be too humble or too fervent. Ah! then from our inmost heart, let these words, "graciously hear us, O Lord!" proceed, for, alas! we know too well that we are guilty, but we do not know, nor never while in this world will we know with certainty, that God has forgiven us.

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* St. John. i, 29.

It is for this reason, that we should every day weep for our sins, endeavor to repair them before the Lord, and beg with renewed ardor that this good God would forget our iniquities.† David, though assured of his pardon by the words of the prophet Nathan, "The Lord hath taken away thy sin,"‡ had, nevertheless, "his crime always before his eyes;"§ he entreated the Most High to purify him, "more and more,"|| and, even at night, he "watered his couch with his tears."¶ What then should we do, we who, alas! have but too often "committed iniquity," yet have not received from the unerring lips of a prophet, the assurance of our reconciliation with God? Even St. Paul, the great apostle who had been transported to the third heaven, also said, "My conscience reproaches me with nothing, yet, for all that I dare not believe myself to be justified."* What! St. Paul, that admirable servant and minister of God, he who had received so many marks of his benevolence and love; that illustrious saint who had accomplished numberless works for the glory of His adorable Master, the incomparable St. Paul, dared not call himself just! and shall we, whose lives have been far from resembling his; we, who after grievous and multiplied sins have done nothing for their expiation, shall we live as if assured of going direct to heaven? Ah! rather let us live in continual sentiments of humility and deep contrition! "The sacrifice," says Bossuet, "is the more agreeable, the more noble is the victim. We cannot then doubt that it is an incomparably greater sacrifice before God for us to humble our hearts, than to mortify our bodies for His love." To the abasement of our spirit before the Lord, let us unite a renewed sorrow for having violated the holy vows made at Baptism, and for having, in a manner, trodden under foot the precious blood † of the divine Lamb who became our Victim. The more bitterly we deplore the misery into which we have fallen, the better shall we recover the good which we have lost. Let us, then, never cease to shed precious tears; and may our sorrow, substituted for eternal torments, imitate in some manner their intolerable perpetuity by a continuance at least to our last agony."

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*Apoc. i, 18. †Ps. lxxviii, 8. ‡II Kings xii, 13. §Ps. l, 5. ||Ibid. ¶Ps. vi, 7.

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* 1 Cor. iv, 4. † Heb. x, 29.

O Lamb of God! immolated figuratively from the beginning of the world; immolated in all the victims which were offered under the Mosaic law; immolated on Calvary, in bloody reality, on the very spot where Adam had formerly been buried, so that, "as in Adam all had died, so all should receive new life in thee;" immolated subsequently and continually in a mystic but real manner on our altars where thou art always living, yet as it were, slain;* is it not the desire of thy heart that we should supplicate thee, should pray thee to be propitious unto us, thou who didst carry "to excess"† thy devotedness for us? Oh no! it is not always the design of thy justice to treat us without mercy, since thou hast given us the grace of repentance and of imploring thee with our whole hearts, and hast given us the desire of expiating the past by sincere conversion.

Oh! thou wilt then allow us to unite with the august pontiffs and ministers of thy Church, who unceasingly pray for all its members to the most holy Virgin, who herself intercedes for us all, and to say with sentiments of humiliation and deep sorrow, but also with full confidence that "in praying thus, we shall be heard:"*

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* Apoc. v, 6. † Eph. ii, 4.

O God, our Savior, graciously hear us![†]

Lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world, graciously hear us!

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* Eccles xxxiii, 4. [†] Ps. lxiv, 6.

MEDITATION LVII.

AGNUS DEI, QUI TOLLIS PECCATA MUNDI, MISERERE NOBIS!

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!

HERE again we earnestly supplicate the pardon of our sins, and conjure the Lamb of God to have mercy on us. This time, we do not use the title of Lord; we, in a manner, seem to wish that the divine Jesus would forget His grandeur and majesty, so greatly offended by us, and remember only His infinite mercy and that admirable compassion, so lively and so tender for us, which He manifested by deigning to pass through all kinds of trials.* By this invocation we make a last appeal to the adorable heart of our divine Savior; an appeal which cannot remain inefficacious. Is it not as if we said to Him, "O thou who didst deliver thyself to death for us,"† who "didst take upon thyself the sins of all men!"* ah! we do not deserve to be heard when we ask pardon for the sins which we have committed, but we supplicate the pity thou hast for us; save us, save us, O divine Lamb! save us for the sake of thy sweet compassion and pure mercy! If, formerly, in tender confidence based on sublime ideas of the majesty of God, David said, "Thou wilt be propitious to my sin, for it is very great;"† if before the Incarnation and Redemption, David entertained so great and so high an idea of this abyss of goodness, which loves to diffuse itself as a dew of grace and pardon; what idea, what sentiments should we have when we address this infinite goodness, manifested to us in the human nature of a God become our Victim? Ah! if we wish to understand the power which our appeals to His compassion have over the tender and devoted heart of this divine Lamb, let us open the book of the Gospels. During His mortal life, who ever cried to Him, "Have mercy on me," and failed to obtain his petition? Two poor blind men followed Him, crying out, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" He touched their eyes and they saw.‡ The woman of Canaan, whose daughter was miserably tormented by a devil, cried out in her turn, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Let it be done according to thy desire," answered Jesus,* and her daughter was cured.

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* Heb. iv, 15. † Eph. v, 2.

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* St. John ii. 2. † Ps. xxiv, 11. ‡ St. Matt. ix, 27.

"Have mercy on my son," said an afflicted father, "for he suffers much."† Jesus delivered him at the same instant. Near Jericho a blind man named Bartemus also implored His compassion: "Son of David, have mercy on me;"‡ Jesus spoke, and the blind man recovered his sight. Ten lepers raised their voices at a distance: "Jesus, our Master, have mercy on us,"§ and they obtained their cure. That admirable sympathy for all human misery, that tender compassion which made St. Peter say of Him, that "He went about doing good,"|| Jesus when glorified could not cease to feel. Ah! behold how He is pleased to testify it more and more by the continued prodigy of the Holy Eucharist. Does He not in this mystery place His blood and all His merits at our disposal? Does He not offer Himself every day, nay every hour as the Victim of Propitiation for our sins? as a sacrifice of impetration for all the graces we may need? Does He not unceasingly make for us a sacrifice of His glory, which is, as it were, annihilated under the humble species of bread and wine? Does He not also make a sacrifice of His liberty, being bound in some manner by the will of His ministers? a sacrifice of His justice, so often provoked by the wickedness of sinners, and suspended by the long suffering of His mercy! Behold how, during nearly two thousand years, this Lamb of God has prolonged His incomparable devotedness for our salvation, has prolonged it without intermission and unceasingly, adding miracle to miracle. Can we then doubt of the vitality, the tenderness, and the generosity of His compassion for hearts wounded by repentance and desirous of His love? Let us, then, say to Him, with sweetest confidence:

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* St. Matt. xv, 22, 28. † St. Matt. xvii, 14. ‡ St. Mark x, 47. § St. Luke xvii, 13. || Acts x, 38.

"O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us," who are so truly deserving of pity, and so unworthy of being regarded by thy goodness! Ah! if thou didst consider only thy infinite justice, thou wouldst strike the ungrateful creatures who have rendered thee evil for good, coldness and outrage for thy love. But if we implore thy mercy, that inexhaustible mercy with which thy heart overflows for penitent sinners, we impetrate that precious blood by which all the flames of the "wrath of God"* are extinguished, and by which is effected "the remission of sins."†

And that our prayers may have more certain access to thee, we unite them to those of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our good and most sweet mother; and, through her sacred lips, we offer thee this pious supplication, which the Church utters through the mouths of all her children,

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* Apoc. xv, 7. † Colloss. i, 14.

Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!

LITANY OF THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN

CALLED

THE LITANY OF LORETTO.

Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy on us.
Christe eleison.	Christ, have mercy on us.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy on us.
Christe audi nos.	Christ, hear us.
Christe exaudi nos.	Christ, graciously hear us.
Pater de cœlis Deus, miserere nobis.	God the Father of heaven, have mercy on us.
Fili Redemptor mundi Deus, miserere nobis.	God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.
Spiritus Sancte Deus, miserere nobis.	God, the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us.
Sancta Trinitas, unus Deus, miserere nobis.	Holy Trinity one God, have mercy on us.

Sancta Maria,	*Ora pro nobis.*	Holy Mary,	*Pray for us.*
Sancta Dei genitrix,		Holy Mother of God,	
Sancta Virgo virginum,		Holy Virgin of virgins,	
Mater Christi,		Mother of Christ,	
Mater divinæ gratiæ,		Mother of divine grace,	
Mater purissima,		Mother most pure,	
Mater castissima,		Mother most chaste,	
Mater inviolata,		Mother undefiled,	
Mater intemerata,		Mother unviolated,	
Mater amabilis,		Mother most amiable,	
Mater admirabilis,		Mother most admirable,	
Mater Creatoris,		Mother of our Creator,	
Mater Salvatoris,		Mother of our Redeemer,	
Virgo prudentissima,		Virgin most prudent,	
Virgo veneranda,		Virgin most venerable,	

Virgo prædicanda,	*Ora pro nobis.*	Virgin most renowned,	*Pray for us.*
Virgo potens,		Virgin most powerful,	
Virgo clemens,		Virgin most clement,	
Virgo fidelis,		Virgin most faithful,	
Speculum justitiæ,		Mirror of justice,	
Sedes sapientiæ,		Seat of wisdom,	
Causa nostræ lætitiæ,		Cause of our joy,	
Vas spirituale,		Spiritual vessel,	
Vas honorabile,		Vessel of honor,	
Vas insigne devotionis,		Vessel of singular devotion,	
Rosa mystica,		Mystical Rose,	
Turris Davidica,		Tower of David,	
Turris eburnea,		Tower of ivory,	
Domus aurea,		House of gold,	
Fœderis arca,		Ark of the covenant,	
Janua cœli,		Gate of heaven,	
Stella matutina,		Morning Star,	
Salus infirmorum,		Health of the weak,	
Refugium peccatorum,		Refuge of sinners,	
Consolatrix afflictorum,		Comforter of the afflicted,	
Auxilium Christianorum,		Help of Christians,	
Regina angelorum,		Queen of angels,	
Regina patriarcharum,		Queen of patriarchs,	
Regina prophetarum,		Queen of prophets,	
Regina apostolorum,		Queen of apostles,	
Regina martyrum,		Queen of martyrs,	
Regina confessorum,		Queen of confessors,	
Regina virginum,		Queen of virgins,	
Regina sanctorum omnium,		Queen of all saints,	
Regina sine labe originali concepta,		Queen conceived without original sin,	

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, parce nobis, Domine.	Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, Spare us, O Lord.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, exaudi nos, Domine.	Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, Graciously hear us, O Lord.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.	Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
Christe, audi nos.	Christ, hear us.
Christe, exaudi nos.	Christ, graciously hear us.

V. Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix.	*V.* Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
R. Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.	*R.* That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.
Oremus.	Let us pray.
Gratiam tuam, quæsumus Domine, mentibus nostris infunde, ut qui, Angelo nuntiante, Christi Filii tui incarnationem cognovimus, per passionem ejus et crucem ad resurrectionis gloriam perducamur. Per eumdem Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.	Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the incarnation of Christ, thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by his passion and cross be brought to the glory of his resurrection. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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